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Nonreciprocal Transport Based on Cavity Floquet Modes in Optomechanics

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Directional transport is obtained in various multimode systems by driving multiple, nonreciprocally interfering interactions between individual bosonic modes. However, systems sustaining the required number of modes become physically complex. In our microwave-optomechanical experiment, we show how to configure nonreciprocal transport between frequency components of a single superconducting cavity coupled to two drumhead oscillators. The frequency components are promoted to Floquet modes and generate the missing dimension to realize an isolator and a directional amplifier. A second cavity left free by this arrangement is used to cool the mechanical oscillators and bring the transduction noise close to the quantum limit. We furthermore uncover a new type of instability specific to nonreciprocal coupling. Our approach is generic and can greatly simplify quantum signal processing and the design of topological lattices from low-dimensional systems.

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Introduction.—Lattices with a high degree of complexity are an excellent medium to implement nontrivial topology. While they exist in nature, realizing one with specific functionalities requires a bottom-up synthesis, which remains challenging. Artificial lattices’ construction has therefore been investigated in cold atoms [1], photonics [2], superconducting circuits [3–5], and cavity optomechanics [6,7]. An intriguing possibility that has received attention recently to demonstrate complex functionalities in a physically low-dimensional system is to complement it with synthetic dimensions [8]. Initially, atoms’ internal degrees of freedom were identified as lattice sites [9] aligned along a nonspatial, synthetic dimension supplementing existing spatial dimensions. Floquet quasienergy levels that emerge in a periodically driven nonlinear system [10–16] and multiple or degenerate resonant modes [12,17,18] have also been considered as sites in additional dimensions. Interestingly, nontrivial topology can be designed in synthetic dimensions just as in spatial dimensions, which can lead to nonreciprocal transport [19].

We focus on microwave cavity optomechanics [20,21] where microwave resonators interact with mechanical vibrations. Microwave-optomechanical signal processing, either reciprocal [22–25] or nonreciprocal [26–30], shows some advantages over Josephson-junctions-based processing [31–39]; saturation powers are orders of magnitude higher and superconductivity is not fundamentally necessary. Multimode optomechanical nonreciprocal devices have recently been suggested [26,40–46] and demonstrated [47–52]. Progress in this direction has nonetheless been hindered by the difficulty of fabricating devices with multiple mechanical modes coupled equivalently and strongly to multiple electromagnetic modes. The use of a single cavity mode for several simultaneous operations has been considered for passive detection of stronger processes [53–55]. Kerr-type nonlinearities have also been shown to promote coupling between Floquet modes [56], which are the quasienergy solutions arising via Floquet’s theorem offset by multiples of the drive frequency. However, exciting a single cavity mode so that multiple Floquet components actively participate in the dynamics has received little attention, with the notable exception of Ref. [57].

In this Letter, we show that configurable and directional electromagnetic-signal transmission can be obtained in an optomechanical system by designing a loop of interactions in the synthetic plane generated by driven Floquet modes on one hand and multiple mechanical modes on the other hand, to realize a microwave isolator and a directional amplifier. This use of Floquet modes provides a way to simplify nonreciprocal devices and alleviate practical requirements.

Principle.—Let us first consider a multimode cavity optomechanical system as shown in Fig. 1(a), similar to the ones used in a number of directional transduction demonstrations [27–30]. Two mechanical oscillators are both coupled to two cavity modes. Both cavities are excited with two pumping tones. Each set of tones enhances one mechanically mediated coupling mechanism between cavities, and the relative phase of pump tones controls the interference between these two coupling processes.

We demonstrate that this physical system can be recast into the one in Fig. 1(b) where different frequency components from a driven Floquet system of the cavity field play the roles of the two cavity modes. The second cavity is left available for auxiliary optomechanical manipulations. The mediating mechanical modes still participate at their respective resonance frequencies [see Fig. 1(c)], and
their narrow bandwidths play an essential role by restricting the number of Floquet manifolds coupled together.

Let us first consider the configuration of the Floquet directional amplifier. The pertaining pump angular frequencies are as schematized in Fig. 1(d): \( \{\omega_i - (\Omega_j + \delta_j + \Delta)\}_{i=1,2} \).

**Fig. 1.** Principle of Floquet nonreciprocal devices. (a) Scheme of a four-mode nonreciprocal transducer. (b) Simplified system exhibiting nonreciprocal transport between off-resonant components of a single cavity field. An auxiliary cavity mode can be used to sideband cool mechanical modes. (c) Scheme of the double mechanically mediated coupling between Floquet modes represented in the generated synthetic dimensions. Mechanical susceptibilities filtering restrict the coupling picture to the central plaquette. (d) Drive frequencies used to build an optomechanical directional amplifier. The auxiliary cavity pumping scheme is not represented (see Supplemental Material [58]). (e) Similar driving scheme to build an isolator. (f) Optical micrograph of the pair of micromechanical drum oscillators.
The elements $S_{ij}$ of this matrix define the scattering parameters between ports $j$ and $i$.

**Experiment.**—An on-chip microwave LC circuit lithographed in aluminum sustains two electromagnetic cavity modes that we coin “primary” and “auxiliary.” The former is used to establish nonreciprocal transfer and the latter to sidestep cool the mechanical modes [60] in order to reduce noise and broaden the bandwidth. The cavity modes have respective frequencies $\omega_1/2\pi = 4.98$ and $\omega_2/2\pi = 6.62$ GHz and internal and external decay rates $\kappa_1/2\pi = 1.3$ MHz, $\kappa_1/2\pi = 190$ kHz, and $\kappa_2/2\pi = 900$, $\kappa_2/2\pi = 580$ kHz. The circuit includes two vacuum-gap capacitors [see Fig. 1(f)] whose top plate is allowed to move freely, materializing mechanical oscillators of frequencies $\Omega_1/2\pi = 6.69$ and $\Omega_2/2\pi = 9.03$ MHz and intrinsic decay rates $\gamma_1/2\pi = 55$ and $\gamma_2/2\pi = 110$ Hz. The chip is mounted in a dilution cryostat to be operated at a temperature of 10 mK.

**Isolator.**—We now discuss the configuration of Fig. 1(e) that employs only red-sideband tones. The global susceptibility matrix in the basis defined by $A$ is modified by a coupling matrix $T$,

$$\chi^{-1}(\omega) = \begin{pmatrix} \frac{\pi}{2} - i(\omega - \Delta) & 0 \\ 0 & \frac{\pi}{2} - i(\omega + \Delta) \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} T_{11} & T_{12} \\ T_{21} & T_{22} \end{pmatrix}.$$  (2)

Diagonal coupling terms $T_{11}$ ($T_{22}$) account for standard backaction of mechanical modes on Floquet cavity modes from the two pumps detuned by $-\Delta$ ($+\Delta$). Off-diagonal terms $T_{ij}$ ($i \neq j$) also involve one contribution from each mechanically mediated coupling path between Floquet cavity modes,

$$T_{12}(\omega) = G_1 G_{1+} \chi_{m,1}(\omega) + G_2 G_{2+} \chi_{m,2}(\omega),$$

$$T_{21}(\omega) = G_1 G_{1+} \chi_{m,1}(\omega) + G_2 G_{2+} \chi_{m,2}(\omega),$$  (3)

where $\chi_{m,j}$ is the susceptibility of mechanical mode $j$, centered on $-\delta_j$: $\chi_{m,j}(\omega) = |\gamma_j/2 - i(\omega + \delta_j)|^{-1}$. Off-diagonal elements of the scattering matrix $S_{12}$ and $S_{21}$ are proportional to $T_{12}$ and $T_{21}$, respectively (see Supplemental Material [58]). Therefore, to obtain, e.g., isolation of port 1 ($S_{12} = 0$), it suffices to cancel out $T_{12}$. In order to maintain simultaneous transfer in the other direction, one must ensure that $S_{21}$, and therefore $T_{21}$, is concurrently as high as possible. This asymmetry is made possible thanks to the phase shift of each coupling path provided by the off-resonance participation of either mechanical oscillator [58].

The experiment is prepared by sideband cooling mechanical oscillators through the auxiliary cavity down to $n_{1\text{eff}} \approx 4.0$ and $n_{2\text{eff}} \approx 8.9$ quanta. Corresponding effective mechanical linewidths are $\gamma_1/2\pi \approx 1.7$ and $\gamma_2/2\pi \approx 1.9$ kHz. The primary cavity is pumped with detuning $\Delta/2\pi = 30$ kHz, much larger than the effective mechanical damping rates, with cooperativities $\{C_{1-}, C_{1+}, C_{2-}, C_{2+}\} = \{3.9, 2.5, 3.7, 2.4\}$ and additional detunings $\delta_1/2\pi = -\delta_2/2\pi = 1$ kHz. By measuring the scattering of a weak probe tone sent along with the pumps [58], we show in Fig. 2(a) an optimal isolation for $\varphi = +55^\circ$ of $|S_{12}|^2 \approx -39.3$ dB with $|S_{21}|^2 \approx -1.3$ dB insertion loss. We also demonstrate for the opposite phase $\varphi = -55^\circ$ a device working in the reversed direction in Fig. 2(b) with $|S_{21}|^2 \approx -24.5$ dB isolation and $|S_{12}|^2 \approx -1.2$ dB insertion loss. The bandwidth around 3 kHz is comparable to the effective mechanical linewidths. Because of relatively small mechanical frequency separation, pumps also excite the mechanical mode they are not intended to drive, leading to dynamical backaction taken into account in the theoretical fits presented throughout the Letter.

The noise in the device arises mainly from mechanical thermal noise [26] which propagates through three paths as indicated in Fig. 2(c): path “a” is the direct conversion of phonons into the same amount of cavity photons. The two others (“b” and “c”) follow the same route as signals across
the device and interfere destructively at the isolated port. Therefore, only path a contributes to backward-propagating noise, which is thus simply half of the mechanical oscillators’ total occupation: \( n_{\text{back}} = \frac{1}{2} (n_1 + n_2 + 1) \) in the limit of high cooperativities and ideal cavity. Here we maintain this noise around \( n_{\text{back}} \approx 2.5 \) quanta [see Fig. 2(e)]. By comparison, without sideband cooling, the expected input-port noise is 35 photons in the ideal case. At the other port [see Fig. 2(d)], direct path a interferes somewhat destructively with the sum of indirect paths b and c and mitigates total fluctuations, which results in very small output noise of thermal origin, and thus \( n_{\text{out}} \approx 0.6 \) quanta [see Fig. 2(e)].

**Directional amplifier.**—Owing to blue-sideband driving, the \( S \) parameters of the amplifier relate \( a(\omega - \Delta) \) to \( a^\dagger(\omega - \Delta) \); they exchange quadratures between input and output ports. This translates the phase-preserving but phase-conjugating nature of the device [61] and entails that signals sent at a frequency \( \omega + \Delta + \nu \) are converted at \( \omega + \Delta + \nu \); that is, the output frequency is mirrored around the port central frequency. As long as the detunings \( \Delta \) are small compared to \( \kappa \), the gain \( G \) in the limit of ideal cavities and large cooperativities remains the same as for separate-cavity amplifiers [26,30,58],

\[
G = \frac{4C_1 - C_{1+}}{(C_{1-} - C_{1+})^2}.
\]

With similar mechanical precooling (\( n_1 \approx 2.9, n_2 \approx 8.1, \gamma_1/2\pi \approx 1.6 \text{ kHz}, \gamma_2/2\pi \approx 0.9 \text{ kHz} \)) and same detuning \( \Delta \) as for the isolator, we use cooperativities \( \{C_{1-}, C_{1+}, C_{2-}, C_{2+}\} \approx \{4.2,3.2,5.3,2.6\} \) to demonstrate in Fig. 3(a) for \( \phi = +48^\circ \) a maximum amplification gain of \( G \approx 20.3 \) dB and a simultaneous isolation of \( |S_{21}|^2 \approx 11.7 \) dB. The amplification and the isolation bandwidths 1.5 and 1 kHz, respectively, are again comparable to the mechanical linewidths, but lower than those of the isolator since they are not enhanced by parasitic coupling (see Supplemental Material [58]). Figure 3(b) also shows a gain of \( |S_{12}|^2 \approx 18.5 \) dB and a simultaneous isolation of \( |S_{21}|^2 \approx -4.7 \) dB with the opposite phase \( \phi = -48^\circ \). However, contrary to the case of the isolator, only one port can be impedance matched to the transmission line due to the asymmetric pumping of red sidebands of one Floquet mode and blue sidebands of the other [58]. As a result of this asymmetry, regardless of the phase, port 1 displays low reflectivity \( |S_{11}|^2 \) and port 2 a large one \( |S_{22}|^2 \) [see insets to Figs. 3(a) and 3(b)]. The optimal configuration is therefore \( \phi = 48^\circ \), which suppresses power reflected on the input port by \( |S_{11}|^2 \approx 7.4 \) dB.

In contrast to the isolator, fluctuations propagating across the amplifier are amplified, which results in a
generally high noise. However, we measure in this configuration only $n_{\text{back}} \approx 3.8$ quanta at port 1 when it is isolated at $\phi = +48^\circ$ [see Fig. 4(c)]. Indeed, as for the isolator, amplified paths b and c interfere destructively and only the nonamplified noise from direct path a contributes to the backward noise, which is at high cooperativities half the total mechanical occupancy and is reduced by active cooling. Output noise results from the same three-path interference as in the isolator and at phase $\phi = +48^\circ$ the added noise is $n_{\text{add}} = n_{\text{out}}/G \approx 2.1$ photons [see Fig. 4(b)], close to the quantum limit of 0.5 photons. On the other hand, for $\phi = -48^\circ$, port 2, which displays high reflective gain $S_{22}$, outputs a backward-propagating noise reaching $n_{\text{back}} \approx 360$ quanta even with aggressive auxiliary cooling. This asymmetry between noise at phases $\phi = \pm 48^\circ$ is visible in Figs. 4(c) and 4(d). This represents a second reason, together with asymmetric impedance matching, for which the behavior of the device is not inverted by simply changing the sign of the phase.

**Phase-dependent instability.**—Nonreciprocal amplification furthermore reveals a new instability for a range of phases. Contrary to optomechanical instability, it does not arise directly from a strong blue-sideband driving but is related to the emergence of an unstable eigenmode of the susceptibility $\chi$. Figures 4(c) and 4(d) show the amplifier noise for a limited range of phase parameters $|\phi| < 55^\circ$ because the device is unstable for the rest of the $360^\circ$ range. As shown in Fig. 4(e), the onset of the instability coincides with the phase at which one of the eigenvalues of the electromagnetic susceptibility matrix acquires a negative real part. Figure 4(c) furthermore shows that noise diverges at these phases. In the isolator case, the eigenvalue with lower real part is stabilized by dynamical backaction and this real-part never crosses zero. The observed instability is therefore specific to nonreciprocally coupled, nonstabilized multimode devices and relates to the instability observed in other phase-preserving nonreciprocal coupling situations [62].

**Conclusion.**—We have theoretically and experimentally demonstrated a new archetype of nonreciprocal optomechanical devices based on the interference of Floquet modes in a single cavity. This physical simplification allows us to accommodate auxiliary optomechanical manipulations of mechanical oscillators to closely approach the quantum limit of the transduction. We foresee that this approach can greatly simplify signal processing in other physical platforms involving resonators. Finally, we uncovered a class of instability arising in nonreciprocally coupled systems provided they are not stabilized by dynamical backaction.

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