EPFL

Laboratory of Quantum Physics:
Topology and Correlations

Quantum transport in Mesoscopic systems
(PHYS-462)

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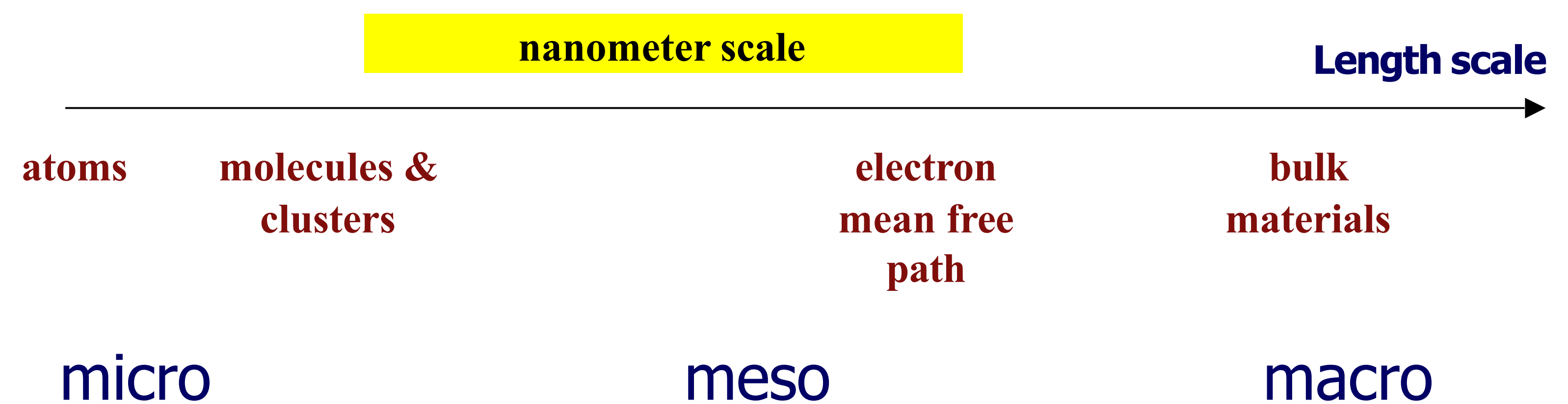
mesoscopic and nanoscale physcis

mesoscopic physics deals with the physics of small objects consisting of a collection of atoms



Ref: Supriyo Dutta/ H.S.J. van der Zant (TU Delft)

Superconductivity

- Discovered earlier (1911) than superfluidity due to higher T_c (Hg, 4.2K?)
- Many similar properties to superfluidity
  - zero resistance $T<T_c$
  - persistent currents
- Differences
  - Perfect diamagnetism: the Meissner effect
  - Energy gap - for measurements involving single electrons, a SC often behaves like a semiconductor

Superconductivity

- Similarity to superfluidity suggests BEC
- But electrons are fermions!
- What happens is that electrons *bind* into *Cooper pairs*. A pair of fermions is a boson, so Cooper pairs can condense.
- Why should they bind? Electrons repel by Coulomb force! This is the question of the "mechanism" of superconductivity

Mechanisms

- There is no *one* mechanism
- BUT most superconductors arising from simple metals (i.e. which are simple metals above T_c) are understood from the BCS theory of pairing due to *electron-phonon coupling*
- Roughly, this arises because an electron distorts the lattice, and this distortion lasts a relatively long time, so that it can attract a second electron, even after the first has left
  - "Retardation": two electrons bind but do not occupy the same position at the same time, so their Coulomb repulsion is minimized.

London theory

- Once we accept that Cooper pairs form, we can study their condensation the same way we study BEC

$$\psi(r) = \sqrt{n_s^*(r)}e^{i\theta(r)}$$ Pair wavefunction

- Similar to superfluid, $\mathbf{p} = \hbar\nabla\theta - q\mathbf{A}$
  - The difference arises from the charge of Cooper pairs

London Theory

- This implies *screening*: check Maxwell eqns
- Pairs: n_s*=n_s/2, q=-2e, m*=2m
- Hence the current is

$$\mathbf{j} = -\frac{qn_s^*}{m*}\mathbf{p} = -\frac{\hbar n_s e}{2m}\left(\nabla\theta + \frac{2e}{\hbar}\mathbf{A}\right)$$

- This is often called the "London equation"
- Use with Maxwell equation to describe screening

London theory

- Maxwell

$$\nabla \times \mathbf{B} = \mu_0 \mathbf{j}$$

$$\nabla \times \nabla \times \mathbf{B} = \mu_0 \nabla \times \mathbf{j}$$

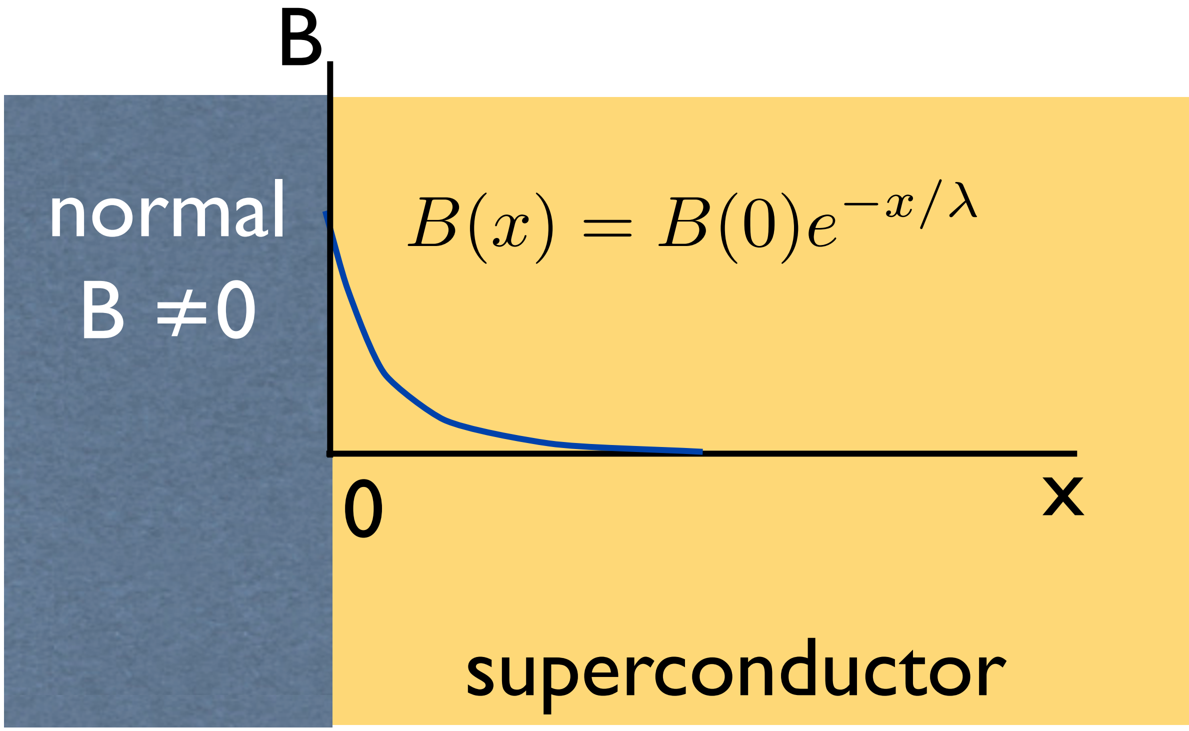
$$\nabla(\nabla \cdot \mathbf{B}) - \nabla^2 \mathbf{B} = \mu_0 \left(-\frac{n_s e^2}{m} \nabla \times \mathbf{A} \right)$$

0

$$\nabla^2 \mathbf{B} = \frac{1}{\lambda^2} \mathbf{B} \qquad \lambda = \left(\frac{m}{n_s e^2 \mu_0} \right)^{1/2}$$

- These two equations describe screening

London theory



λ is called London penetration depth

λ ~ 10-100nm typically

Meissner Effect

- The above argument suggests screening of magnetic fields is due to currents which flow because of infinite conductivity
- If there was “only” infinite conductivity, then we would expect that an applied field would not penetrate, but that if we *started* an experiment with a field applied, and then cooled a material from the normal to superconducting state, the field would remain
- This is in fact not true: magnetic fields are actively *expelled* from superconductors

Meissner effect

- Expulsion of an applied field occurs because in the superconducting state, the field *costs free energy*, i.e. is thermodynamically unfavorable

- Free energy

$$F = \int d^3r \left[n_s^* \frac{p^2}{2m^*} + a(n_s - n_s^{\rm eq})^2 + \frac{B^2}{2\mu_0} \right]$$

Meissner Effect

$$F = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s}{8m} |\hbar \nabla \theta + 2e\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{B^2}{2\mu_0} \right]$$

gauge: we can always choose A
to cancel ∇θ

$$F = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s e^2}{2m} |\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{|\mathbf{B}|^2}{2\mu_0} \right]$$

key point: if $B \neq 0$, A must vary linearly with r, which implies $|A|^2$ diverges. Superconducting kinetic energy becomes infinite!

Meissner effect

$$F = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s e^2}{2m}|\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{|\mathbf{B}|^2}{2\mu_0}\right]$$

- Instead, superconducting state *expels* the field.
- Eventually, if a large enough field is applied to a superconductor, the superconductivity is destroyed

Meissner effect

- To estimate the *critical field*, we need to compare the Gibbs free energy

$$G = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s e^2}{2m}|\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{|\mathbf{B}|^2}{2\mu_0} - \mathbf{H}\cdot\mathbf{B}\right]$$

- In the SC state, $n_s = n_s^{eq}$, A=B=0

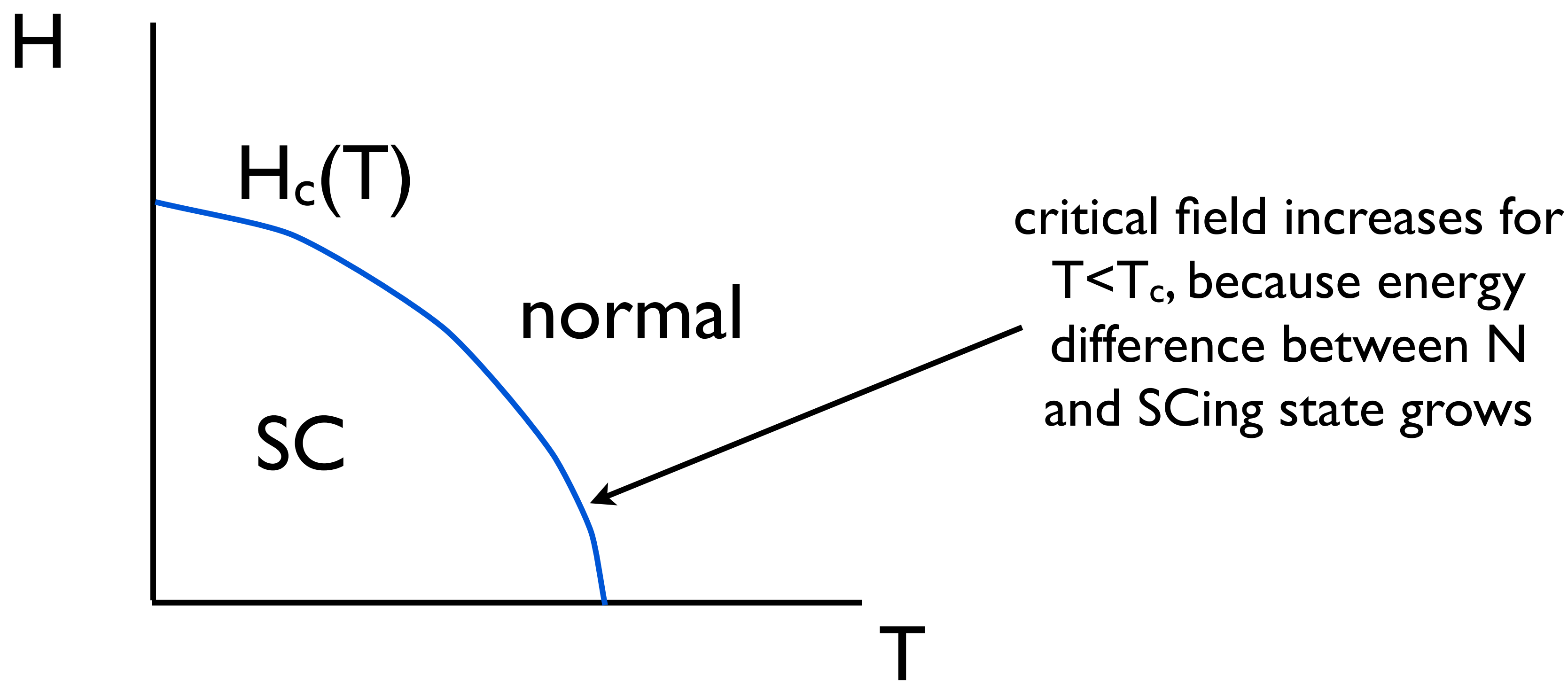
$$G_{sc} = 0$$

- In the normal state, $n_s=0$, $B=\mu_0 H$

$$G_n = V\left[a\left(n_s^{\mathrm{eq}}\right)^2 - \frac{\mu_0}{2}H^2\right]$$

- Equality $G_{sc}=G_n$ defines the critical field H_c

Meissner effect



This describes so-called “type I” superconductors

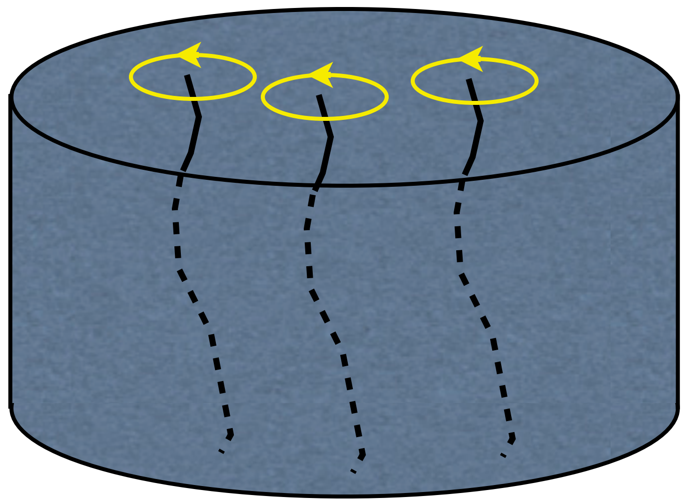
Some superconductors are “type II” and have a different phase diagram

Vortices

- In the previous, we assumed that the system had to be uniform and homogeneous
- It turns out that sometimes a non-uniform state is favored -- a collection of vortices
- Vortices are like those in superfluid helium, except that the "fluid" that is flowing is charged

Vortices

$\theta \to \theta + 2\pi$



$$\oint \nabla\theta \cdot dr = 2\pi$$

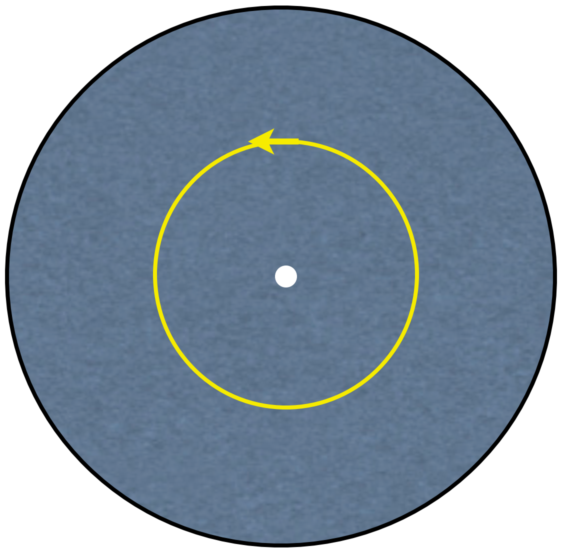
around a single vortex

- Free energy?

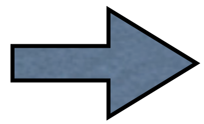
$$F = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s}{8m}|\hbar\nabla\theta + 2e\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{B^2}{2\mu_0}\right]$$

- Minimized for $\mathbf{A} = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\nabla\theta \quad B = 0 \quad n_s = n_s^{\mathrm{eq}}$

Vortices



$$\mathbf{A} = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\nabla\theta$$



$$\mathbf{B} = \nabla \times \mathbf{A} = 0$$

$$\oint \mathbf{A} \cdot d\ell = \frac{\hbar}{2e} 2\pi = \frac{h}{2e} = \varphi_0$$

- This implies *flux quantization*
- Note that it is quantized in units of *half* the flux quantum we saw in the IQHE
- This is directly related to the fact that Cooper *pairs* are condensed.

Vortices

- Apparent contradiction:

$$\mathbf{B} = \nabla \times \mathbf{A} = 0 \qquad \oint \mathbf{A} \cdot d\ell = \iint \mathbf{B} \cdot d\hat{\mathbf{z}} = \varphi_0$$

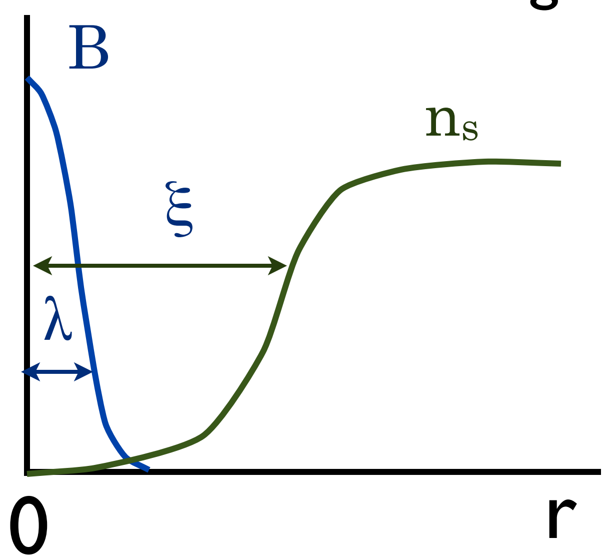
- This would seem to imply that

$$B_z = \varphi_0 \delta(x)\delta(y)$$

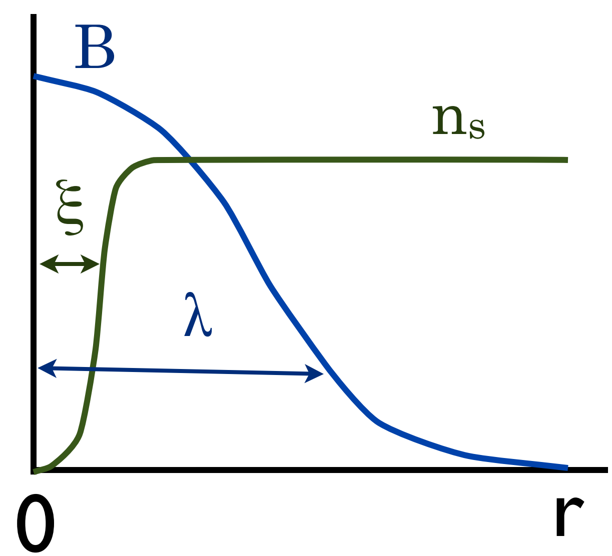
- We can have A ~ $\nabla\theta$ only *far* from the vortex core
  - So in reality the magnetic field is spread out
  - And in addition $n_s \to 0$ at the vortex core

Vortices

- Flux is spread out over radius λ
- Condensed is depleted over radius ξ, called the *coherence length*



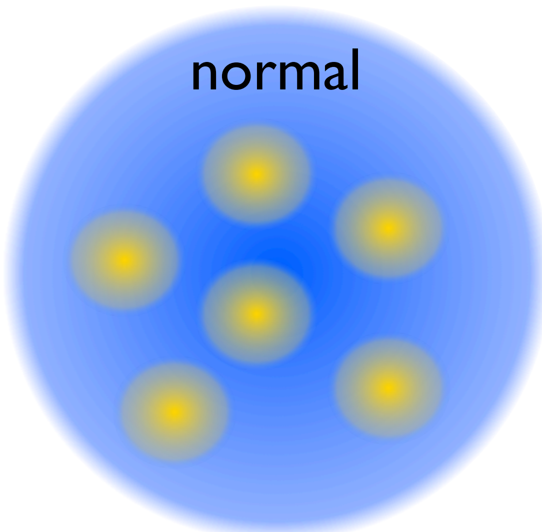
ξ >> λ
type I



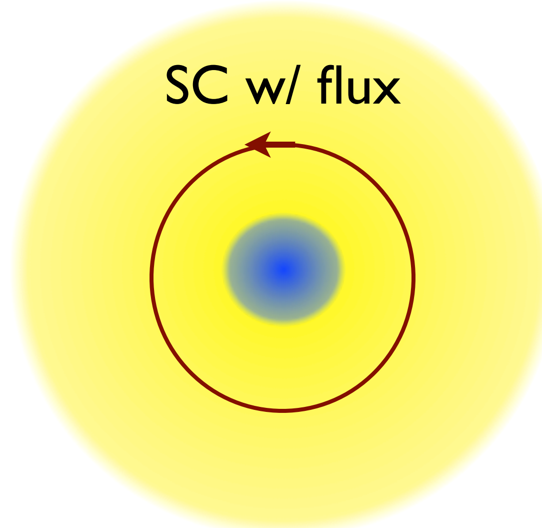
ξ << λ
type II

Type I versus type II

type I



type II

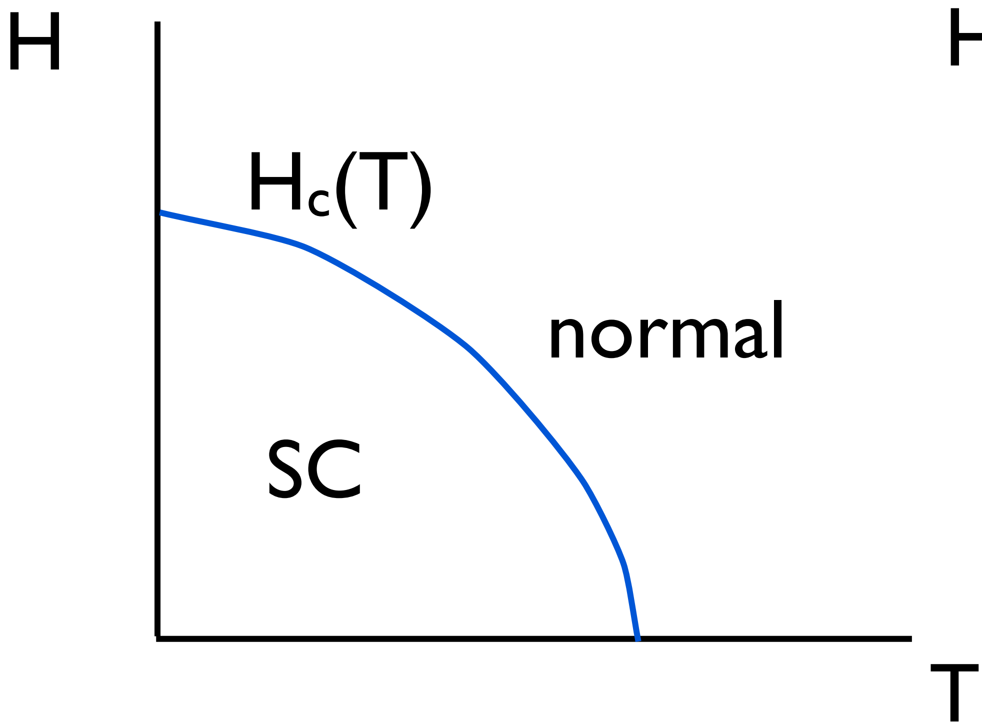


$$F = \int d^3r \left[\frac{n_s}{8m} |\hbar \nabla \theta + 2e\mathbf{A}|^2 + a(n_s - n_s^{\mathrm{eq}})^2 + \frac{B^2}{2\mu_0} \right]$$

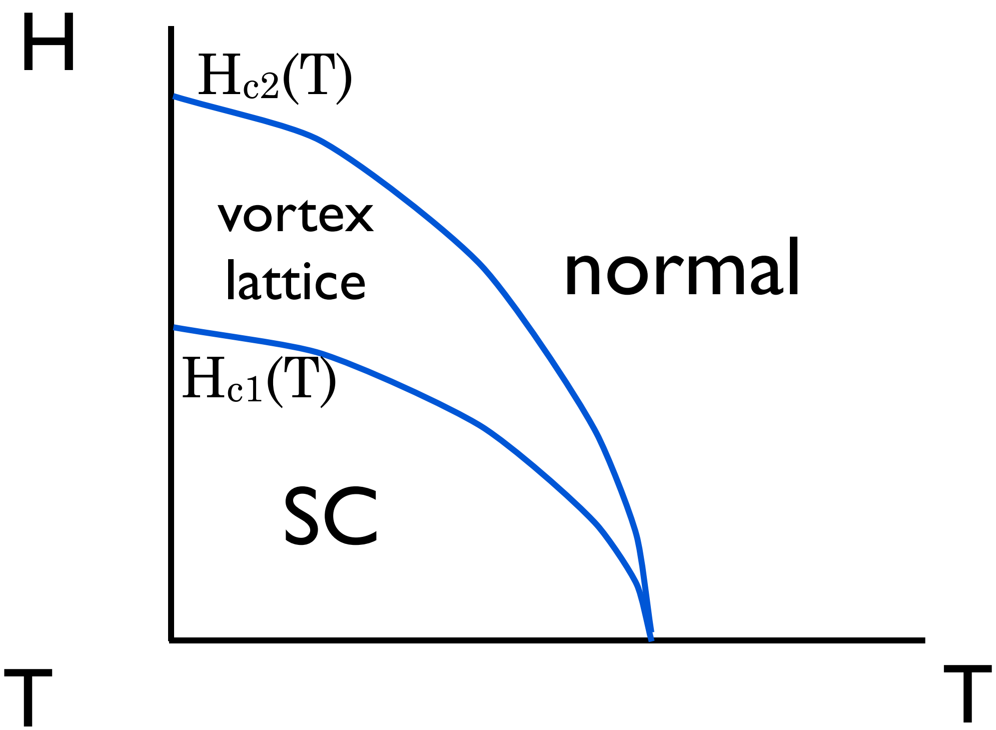
no cost to add more flux inside core: flux clumps together and enters system all at once

additional flux costs more energy.

Phase diagrams



Type I



Type II

$$\lambda/\xi > 1/\sqrt{2}$$

Quasiparticles

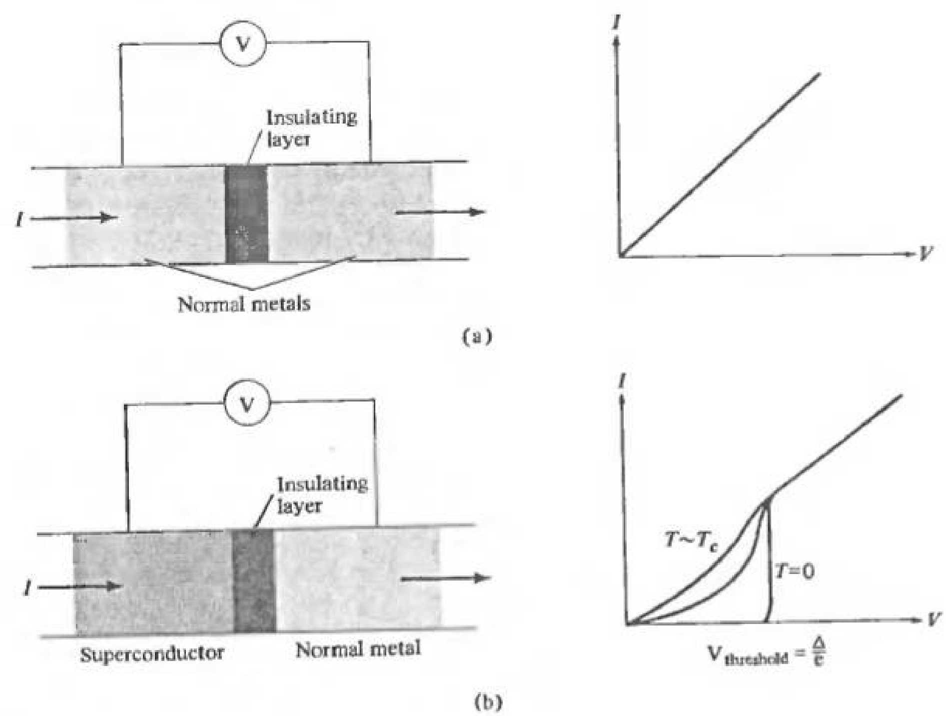
- In superfluid He, it is the elementary boson - the helium atom - which condenses.
- But in a superconductor, only pairs condense. We can still ask about individual *unpaired electrons*
- These are still fermions, and so are obviously not condensed
- In fact, since they are bound, it costs a non-zero energy to "break" a pair and create such "quasiparticles". This is called the *gap*.

Quasiparticles

- Many experiments probe individual quasiparticles:
  - Tunneling
  - Photoemission
  - Thermal conductivity
  - Optics
  - ...

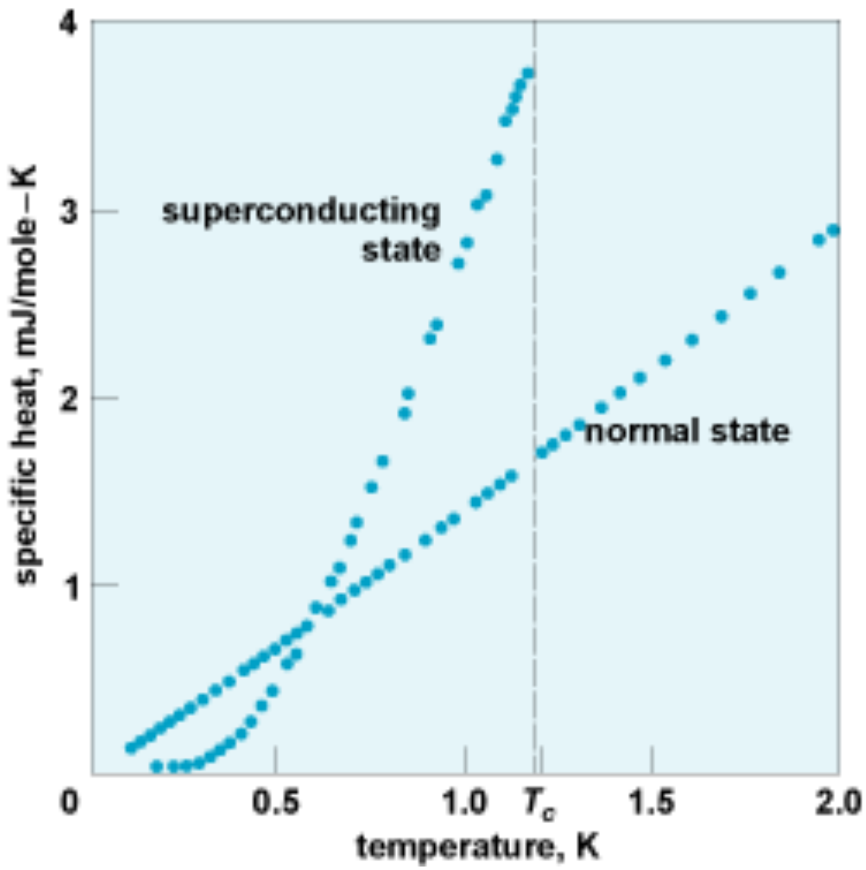
Tunneling

- Measures available density of states for quasiparticles



Specific heat

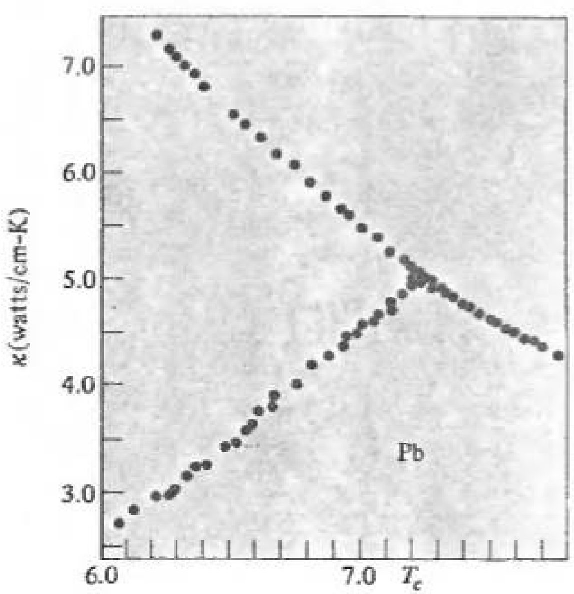
- Typically activated, ~ $e^{-\Delta/kT}$



Thermal conductivity

- Superconductors become thermally insulating. Note contrast to superfluids which have *ballistic* heat conduction. Due to fact that normal electrons diffuse instead of convecting

Figure 34.2
The thermal conductivity of lead. Below T_c the lower curve gives the thermal conductivity in the superconducting state, and the upper curve, in the normal state. The normal sample is produced below T_c by application of a magnetic field, which is assumed otherwise to have no appreciable affect on the thermal conductivity. (Reproduced by permission of the National Research Council of Canada from J. H. P. Watson and G. M. Graham, *Can. J. Phys.* **41**, 1738 (1963).)



BCS theory

Bardeen, Cooper, Schrieffer, 1957

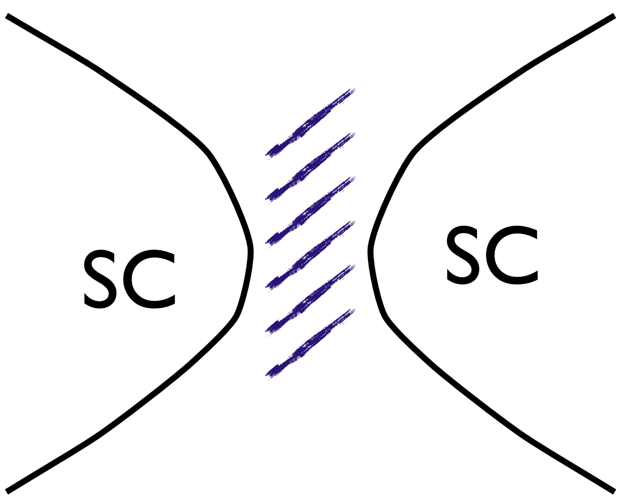
- For conventional superconductors, there is a quantitative theory of the mechanism, which describes how electrons pair and describes the quasiparticles
- This relies on the fact that $\xi >> \lambda_F$ in those materials, which means the pairs are “large” and highly overlapping
- This enables construction of a “mean field theory” - we will see an example of this later when we discuss magnetism

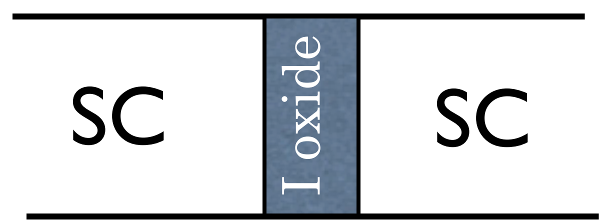
BCS theory

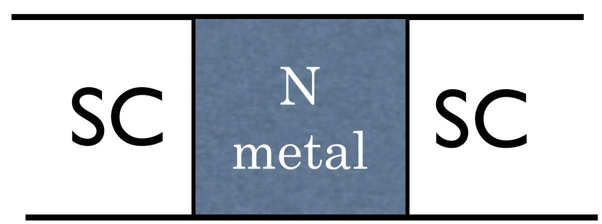
- Because $\xi \gg \lambda_F$, you cannot really think of Cooper pairs are tightly bound molecules
- Instead, onset of superconductivity is not so much BEC of Cooper pairs, but rather the point at which the pairs themselves form
- BCS theory predicts $\Delta(0) = 1.764 k T_c$
  - as well as T dependence of gap, etc.

Josephson effects

- Occurs whenever two superconductors are connected by a "weak link", a narrow non-superconducting region



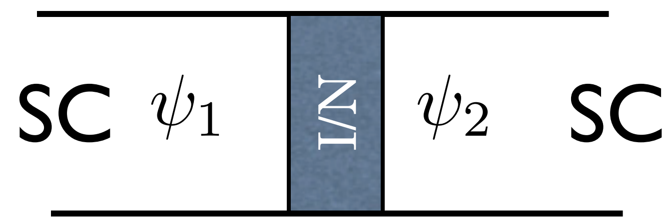




Josephson effects

- Josephson (1962): It is possible for a supercurrent to flow across the normal region - the "junction" - by tunneling
    - It is surprising this was noticed so late in the history of superconductivity
    - One of the rare theory-led discoveries (like TIs!)
- Josephson used microscopic BCS theory to derive this, but the effect is very general and can be understood without BCS theory.

Free energy

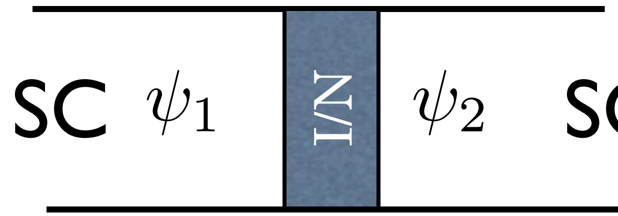


$$\psi_i = |\psi| e^{i\theta_i}$$

- If electrons can move across the barrier (even a little), then they can transmit phase information from one SC to another
- Free energy will depend upon the phase difference

$$F \stackrel{?}{=} F_1 + F_2 - E_J \cos(\theta_1 - \theta_2)$$

Free energy



- This is not "gauge invariant" - it depends on how we choose our vector and scalar potentials for electromagnetism
- The gauge-invariant free energy is

$$F_J = -E_J \cos\left(\theta_1 - \theta_2 - \frac{2e}{\hbar}\int_1^2 \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell\right)$$

= γ: gauge-invariant phase difference

Josephson relation

- Josephson realized there is a relation between the phase and the voltage

$$\partial_t \theta_i = -\frac{\epsilon_i}{\hbar} = \frac{2e}{\hbar}\varphi_i \qquad (\varphi = \text{scalar potential})$$

$$\partial_t \gamma = \frac{2e}{\hbar}(\varphi_1 - \varphi_2) - \frac{2e}{\hbar}\int_1^2 \partial_t \mathbf{A} \cdot d\mathbf{r}$$

$$\partial_t \gamma = \frac{2e}{\hbar}\int_1^2 (-\nabla\varphi - \partial_t \mathbf{A}) \cdot d\mathbf{r}$$

$$= \frac{2e}{\hbar}\int_1^2 \partial_t \mathbf{E} \cdot d\mathbf{r} = \frac{2e}{\hbar}V$$

Current

- Consider work done by small change of phase:

$$dF = IV\,dt = I\frac{\hbar}{2e}d\gamma$$

- But

$$dF = d(-E_J\cos\gamma) = E_J\sin\gamma d\gamma$$

$$I = \frac{2eE_J}{\hbar}\sin\gamma$$

- Hence a constant phase can produce a supercurrent, with zero voltage, for $I<I_c$, with critical current

$$I_c = \frac{2eE_J}{\hbar}$$

Size of critical current

- The amount of current a JJ can carry is obviously dependent upon the junction
- Natural to expect that I_c is correlated with the conductance G in the normal state
- Ambegaokar/Baratoff formula (BCS theory):

$$I_c R_n = \frac{\pi\Delta}{2e}\tanh\left(\frac{\Delta}{2kT}\right)$$

dimensions make sense!

Consequences

- Zero-bias (dissipationless) current
- AC Josephson effect: a voltage induces an oscillating current

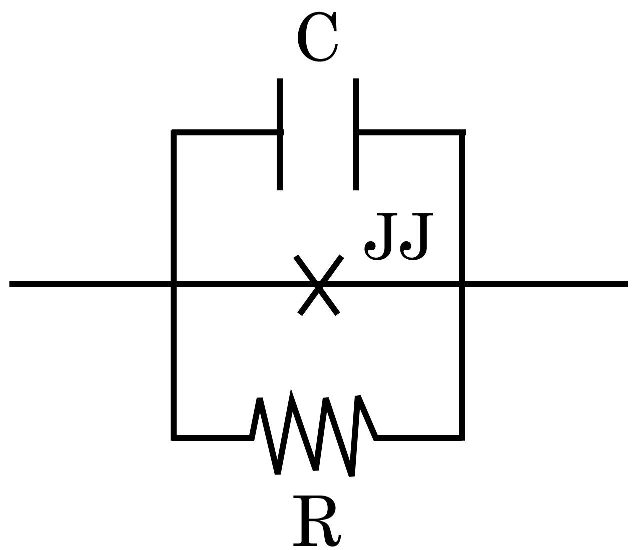
Josephson frequency

$$\gamma = \frac{2eVt}{\hbar} \quad \Rightarrow \quad I(t) = I_c \sin \frac{2eV}{\hbar} t$$

RCSJ model

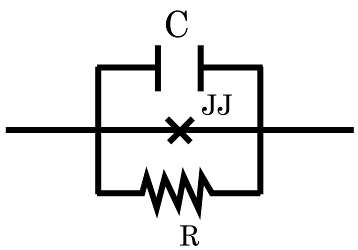
Resistively Capacitance Shunted Junction

- A simple model for the IV curve of a JJ



$$I = I_c \sin\gamma + \frac{V}{R} + C\frac{dV}{dt}$$

$$V = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\frac{d\gamma}{dt}$$

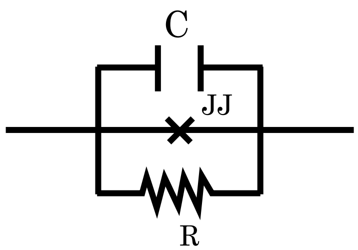


RCSJ model

- Same equation as a *pendulum* or particle in a *tilted washboard* potential

$$\frac{d^2\gamma}{dt^2} + \frac{1}{RC}\frac{d\gamma}{dt} + \frac{2eI_c}{\hbar C}\sin\gamma = \frac{2eI}{\hbar C}$$

- $I<I_c$: constant phase: V=0
- $I>I_c$: pendulum spins: non-zero average voltage



RCSJ model

- Consider over-damped limit $\frac{1}{RC} \gg \sqrt{\frac{2eI_c}{\hbar C}}$

$$\cancel{\frac{d^2\gamma}{dt^2}} + \frac{1}{RC}\frac{d\gamma}{dt} + \frac{2eI_c}{\hbar C}\sin\gamma = \frac{2eI}{\hbar C} \;\Rightarrow\; \frac{d\gamma}{dt} = \frac{2eI_cR}{\hbar}\left(\frac{I}{I_c} - \sin\gamma\right) > 0$$

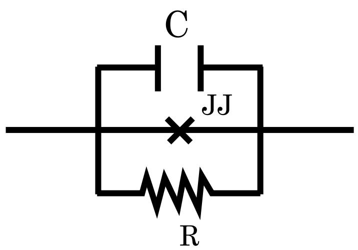
$$\Rightarrow \int \frac{d\gamma}{I/I_c - \sin\gamma} = \int \frac{2eI_cR}{\hbar}dt = \frac{2eI_cR}{\hbar}t$$

time for one cycle

$$t_{2\pi} = \frac{\hbar}{2eI_cR}\int_0^{2\pi} \frac{d\gamma}{I/I_c - \sin\gamma} = \frac{\hbar}{2eI_cR}\frac{2\pi}{\sqrt{(I/I_c)^2 - 1}}$$

DC voltage

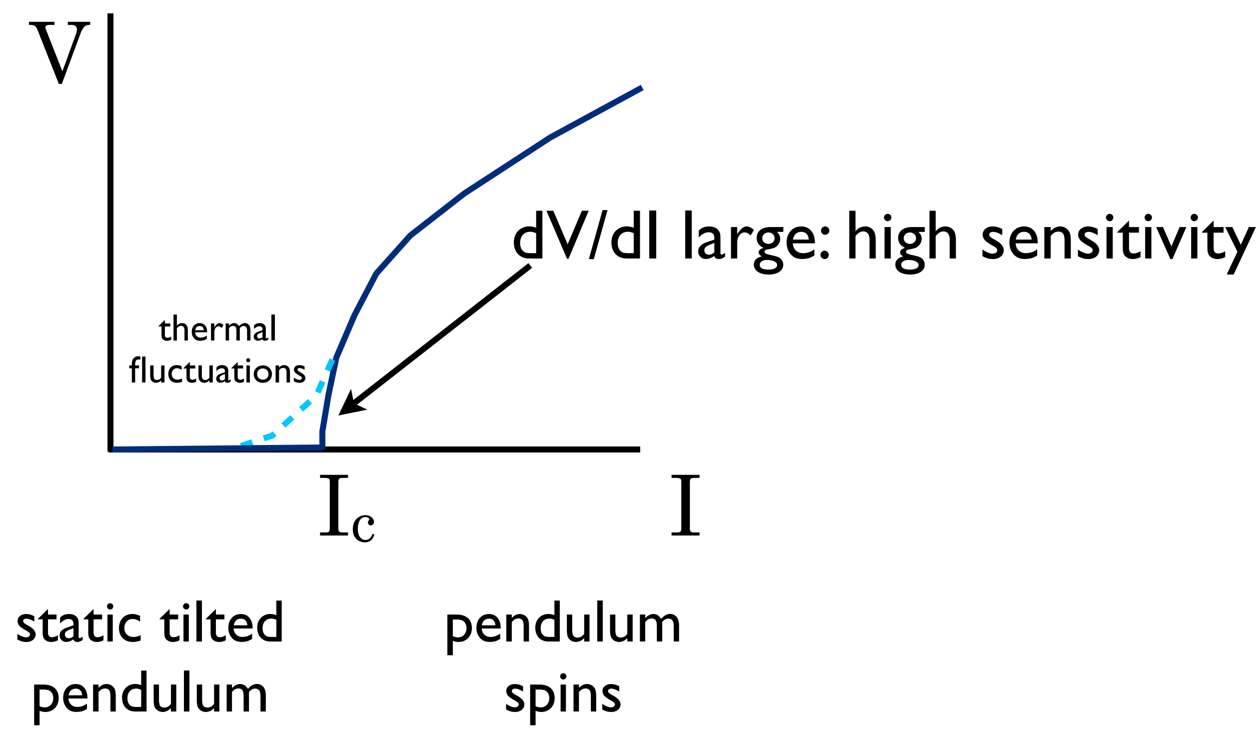
$$V = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\left\langle \frac{d\gamma}{dt} \right\rangle_{av} = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\frac{2\pi}{t_{2\pi}} = R\sqrt{I^2 - I_c^2}$$



RCSJ model

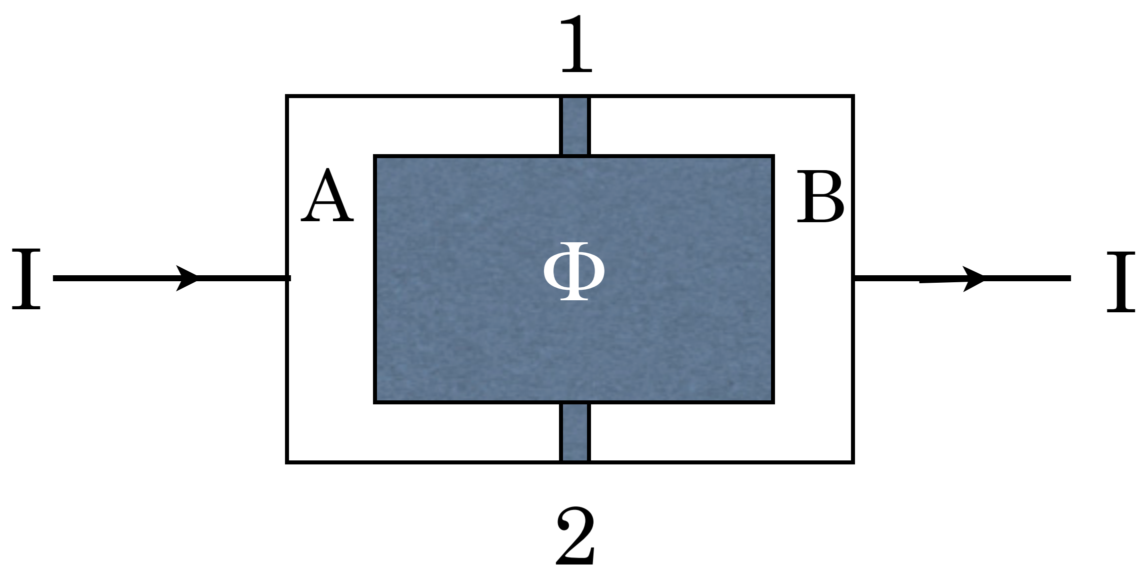
- Consider over-damped limit $\frac{1}{RC} \gg \sqrt{\frac{2eI_c}{\hbar C}}$

$$V = R\sqrt{I^2 - I_c^2}$$

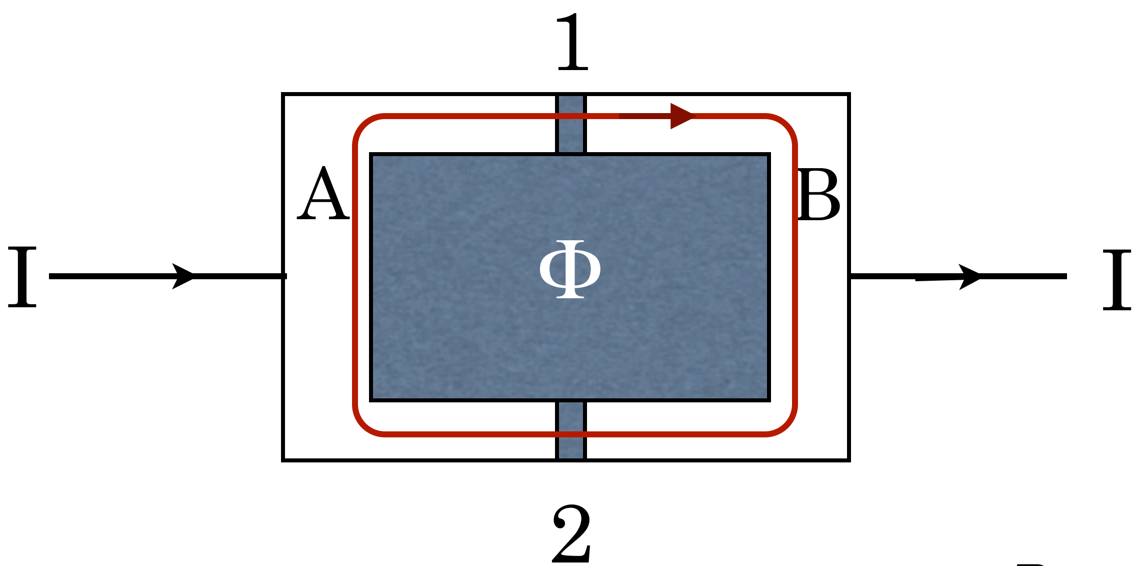


SQUIDs

- SQUID = Superconducting QUantum Interference Device.
- Many kinds of SQUIDs. Here just consider DC-SQUID, a sensitive magnetometer



dc SQUID



in SC, current is negligible, since only small currents can cross barriers.

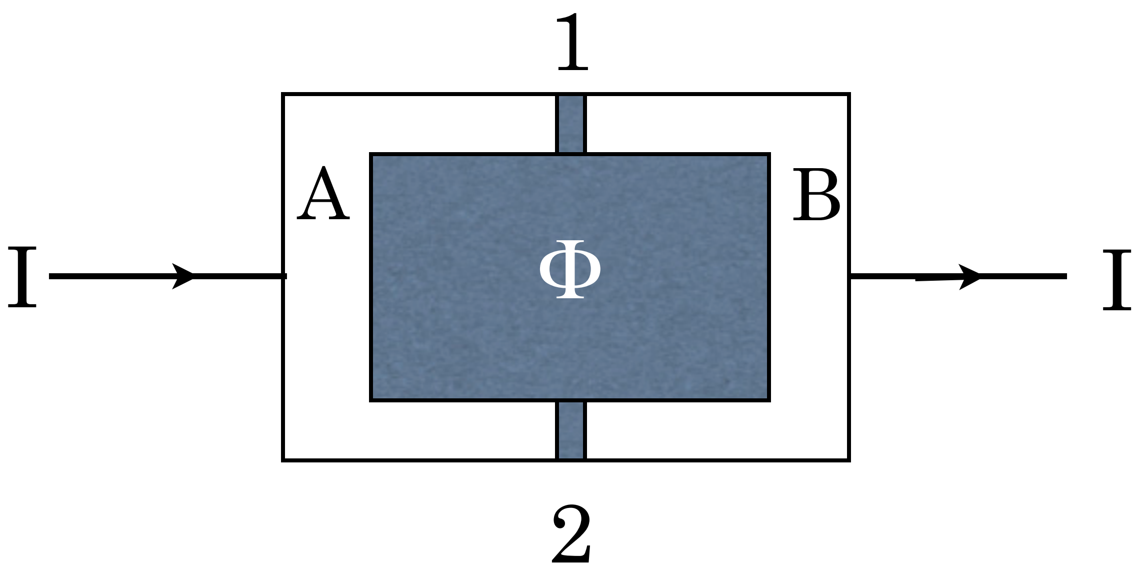
$$\mathbf{J} \propto \nabla\theta - \frac{2e}{\hbar}\mathbf{A} \approx 0$$

$$\oint \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell = \oint_{\text{inside SC}} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell + \int_{A_1}^{B_1} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell + \int_{B_2}^{A_2} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell$$

$$\Phi = \frac{\hbar}{2e}\oint_{\text{inside SC}} \nabla\theta\cdot d\ell + \int_{A_1}^{B_1} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell + \int_{B_2}^{A_2} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell$$

$$= \frac{\hbar}{2e}\left(\theta_{A_1} - \theta_{A_2} + \theta_{B_2} - \theta_{B_1}\right) + \int_{A_1}^{B_1} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell + \int_{B_2}^{A_2} \mathbf{A}\cdot d\ell \;=\; \frac{1}{2\pi}\frac{h}{2e}\left(\gamma_1 - \gamma_2\right)$$

dc SQUID

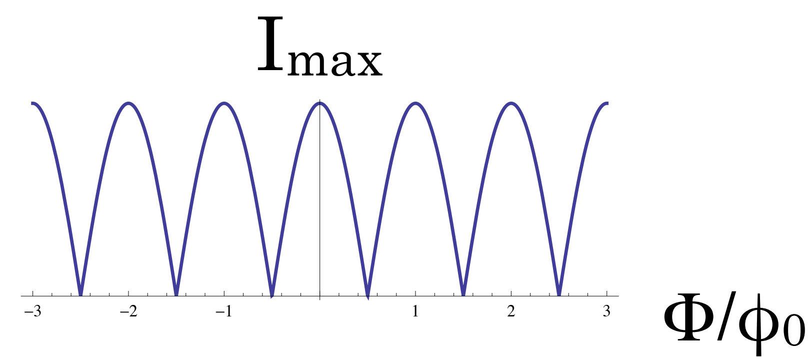


$$\gamma_1 - \gamma_2 = 2\pi\left(\frac{\Phi}{\varphi_0}\right)$$

$$I = I_c \sin\gamma_1 + I_c \sin\gamma_2 = 2I_c \cos\left(\frac{\gamma_1 - \gamma_2}{2}\right)\sin\left(\frac{\gamma_1 + \gamma_2}{2}\right)$$

$$= 2I_c \cos\left(\frac{\pi\Phi}{\varphi_0}\right)\sin\left(\frac{\gamma_1 + \gamma_2}{2}\right)$$

$$I_{\max} = 2I_c\left|\cos\left(\frac{\pi\Phi}{\varphi_0}\right)\right|$$



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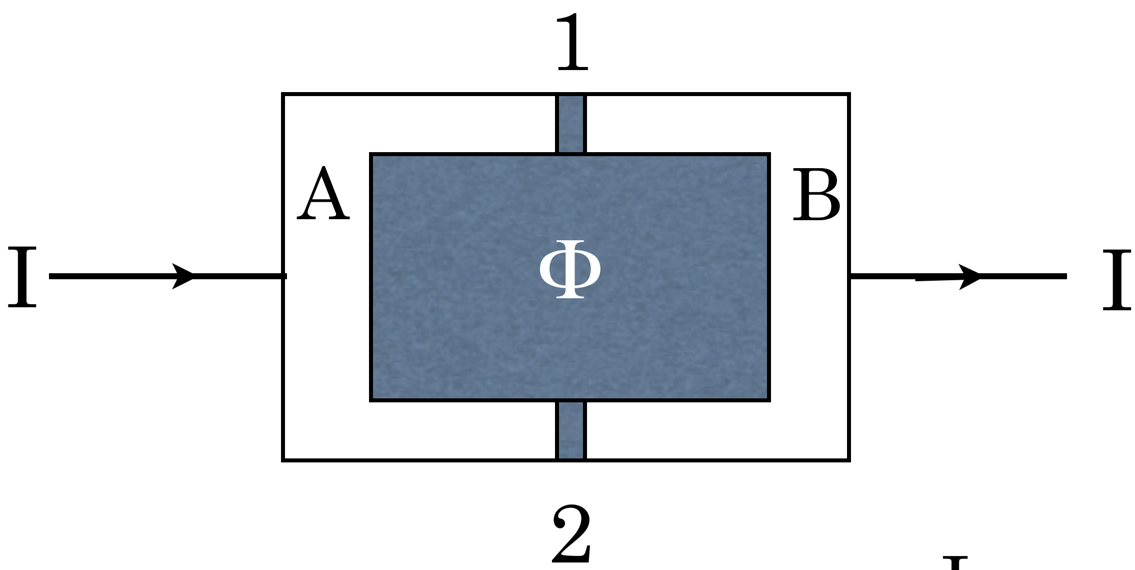
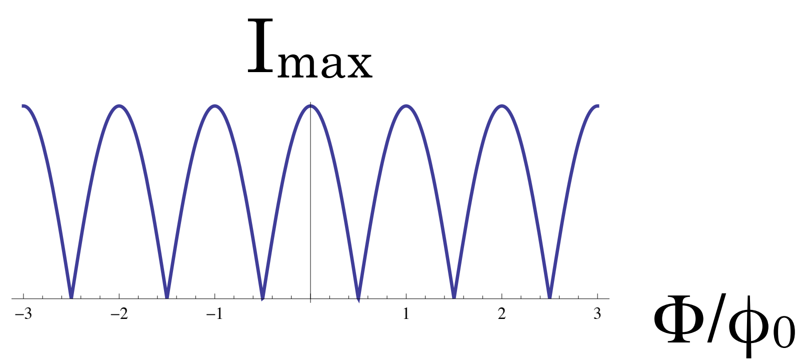


$$\gamma_1 - \gamma_2 = 2\pi\left(\frac{\Phi}{\varphi_0}\right)$$

$$I_{\max} = 2I_c\left|\cos\left(\frac{\pi\Phi}{\varphi_0}\right)\right|$$



typically operate slightly above the max critical current, where voltage then varies rapidly with flux