

# On the relation between an operator and its self-commutator

N. Filonov<sup>a</sup>, Y. Safarov<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Steklov Mathematical Institute, Fontanka 27, St Petersburg, Russia*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Mathematics, King's College London, Strand, London, UK*

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## Abstract

We show that a bounded operator  $A$  on a Hilbert space belongs to a certain set associated with its self-commutator  $[A^*, A]$ , provided that  $A - zI$  can be approximated by invertible operators for all complex numbers  $z$ . The theorem remains valid in a general  $C^*$ -algebra of real rank zero under the assumption that  $A - zI$  belong to the closure of the connected component of unity in the set of invertible elements. This result implies the Brown–Douglas–Fillmore theorem and Huaxin Lin's theorem on almost commuting matrices. Moreover, it allows us to refine the former and to extend the latter to operators of infinite rank and other norms (including the Schatten norms on the space of matrices). The proof is based on an abstract theorem, which states that a normal element of a  $C^*$ -algebra of real rank zero satisfying the above condition has a resolution of the identity associated with any open cover of its spectrum.

*Keywords:* Operator algebras, almost commuting operators, self-commutator, Brown–Douglas–Fillmore theorem, approximate spectral projections  
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## Introduction

Let  $X$  and  $Y$  be bounded self-adjoint operators on a Hilbert space  $H$ . The paper deals with the following well known problem: if the commutator  $[X, Y]$  is small in an appropriate sense, is there a pair of commuting operators  $\tilde{X}$  and  $\tilde{Y}$  which are close to  $X$  and  $Y$ ? Note that for general bounded operators  $X$  and  $Y$  it is not necessarily true (see Subsection 5.9).

For self-adjoint  $X$  and  $Y$ , taking  $A := X + iY$ , one can reformulate the question as follows: if the self-commutator  $[A^*, A]$  is small, is there a normal operator  $\tilde{A}$  close to  $A$ ? There are some positive results in this direction. Probably, the most famous is the Brown–Douglas–Fillmore theorem [1].

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*Email addresses:* `filonov@pdmi.ras.ru` (N. Filonov), `yuri.safarov@kcl.ac.uk` (Y. Safarov)

**Theorem 0.1.** *If  $H$  is separable,  $[A^*, A]$  is compact and the corresponding to  $A$  element of the Calkin algebra has trivial index function then there is a normal operator  $T$  such that  $A - T$  is compact.*

Another is due to Huaxin Lin [2].

**Theorem 0.2.** *There exists a continuous function  $F : [0, \infty) \mapsto [0, 1]$  vanishing at the origin such that the distance from  $A$  to the set of normal operators is estimated by  $F(\|[A^*, A]\|)$  for all finite rank operators  $A$  with  $\|A\| \leq 1$ .*

A related question is whether an operator  $A$  with small self-commutator is close to a diagonal operator. Recall that an operator  $T$  on a separable Hilbert space is said to be diagonal if it is represented by a diagonal matrix in some orthonormal basis. Clearly, all diagonal operators are normal. The following result was obtained in [3] and is usually referred to as the Weyl–von Neumann–Berg theorem.

**Theorem 0.3.** *Let  $A$  be a (not necessarily bounded) normal operator on a separable Hilbert space. Then for each  $\varepsilon > 0$  there exist a diagonal operator  $D_\varepsilon$  and a compact operator  $K_\varepsilon$  with  $\|K_\varepsilon\| \leq \varepsilon$  such that  $A = D_\varepsilon + K_\varepsilon$ .*

Our main result is Theorem 2.12, which shows that a bounded operator  $A$  belongs to a certain set associated with its self-commutator whenever  $A - \lambda I$  can be approximated by invertible operators for all  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$ . Theorem 2.12 implies both the BDF and Huaxin Lin’s theorems. Moreover, it allows us to refine the former and to extend the latter to operators of infinite rank and other norms (see Subsections 3.1 and 3.3, Corollary 2.14 and Remark 2.11). In particular, we obtain

- (i) a quantitative version of Theorem 0.1, which links the BDF and Weyl–von Neumann–Berg theorems for bounded operators, and
- (ii) an analogue of Huaxin Lin’s theorem for the Schatten norms of finite matrices.

Theorem 2.12 holds for any unital  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  of real rank zero, but in the general case we need a slightly stronger condition on  $A$ . Namely, we assume that  $A - \lambda I$  belong to the closure of the connected component of unity in the set of invertible elements in  $L$  for all  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$ .

Our proof of Theorem 2.12 uses the  $C^*$ -algebra technique developed in [4] and [5] and cannot be significantly simplified by assuming that  $L$  is the  $C^*$ -algebra of all bounded operators. One of the main ingredients in the proof is the part of Corollary 2.5 which says that a normal operator satisfying the above condition can be approximated by normal operators with finite spectra. This statement is contained in [5, Theorem 3.2]. The authors indicated how it could be proved but did not present complete arguments. Therefore, for reader’s convenience, we give operator-theoretic proofs of this and relevant results. More precisely, we deduce Corollary 2.5 from Theorem 2.1, which seems to be new and may be of independent interest.

## 1. Notation and auxiliary results

### 1.1. Notation and definitions

Let  $H$  be a complex Hilbert space (not necessarily separable). Throughout the paper,

- $\mathcal{B}(H)$  is the  $C^*$ -algebra of all bounded operators in  $H$ ;
- $\sigma(A)$  denotes the spectrum of  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$ ;
- $L$  is a unital  $C^*$ -algebra represented on the Hilbert space  $H$ , so that  $L \subseteq \mathcal{B}(H)$ .

Recall that, by the Gelfand–Naimark theorem, such a representation exists for any unital  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$ .

Every operator  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  admits the polar decomposition  $A = V|A|$ , where  $|A|$  is the self-adjoint operator  $\sqrt{A^*A}$  and  $V$  is an isometric operator such that  $VH = \overline{AH}$  and  $\ker V = \ker A = \ker |A|$ . If  $A$  is normal then  $V|A| = |A|V$ .

*Remark 1.1.* If  $A \in L$  then  $f(|A|) \in L$  for any continuous function  $f$ . If, in addition,  $A$  is invertible then  $V = A|A|^{-1}$  is a unitary element of  $L$  because  $|A|^{-1}$  can be approximated by continuous functions of  $|A|$ . In particular, this implies that  $A^{-1} \in L$ . If  $A \in L$  is not invertible then the isometric operator  $V$  in its polar representation does not have to belong to  $L$ .

*Remark 1.2.* The spectral projections of a normal operator  $A \in L$  may not lie in  $L$ . However, the spectral projection corresponding to a connected component of  $\sigma(A)$  belongs to  $L$ , since it can be written as a continuous function of  $A$ .

Further on

- $L^{-1}$  is the set of invertible operators in  $L$ ;
- $L_0^{-1}$  denotes the connected component of  $L^{-1}$  containing the identity operator;
- $L_n$ ,  $L_u$ , and  $L_s$  are the sets of normal, unitary and self-adjoint operators in  $L$  respectively;
- $L_f$  is the set of operators  $A \in L$  with finite spectra;
- if  $M \subset L$  then  $\overline{M}$  denotes the norm closure of the set  $M$  in  $L$ .

Clearly, the sets  $L^{-1}$  and  $L_0^{-1}$  are open in  $L$ , and the sets  $L_n$ ,  $L_u$  and  $L_s$  are closed.

One says that

- $L$  has *real rank zero* if  $\overline{L^{-1} \cap L_s} = L_s$ .

The concept of real rank of a  $C^*$ -algebra was introduced in [6]. A unital  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  has real rank zero if and only if any self-adjoint operator  $A \in L$  is the norm limit of a sequence of self-adjoint operators from  $L$  with finite spectra (see Corollary 2.4 and Subsection 5.1).

*Remark 1.3.* Note that any self-adjoint operator  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  is approximated in the norm topology by invertible self-adjoint operators of the form  $f(A)$ , where  $f$  are suitable real-valued Borel functions. Therefore, all von Neumann algebras (in particular,  $\mathcal{B}(H)$  and the algebra of finite  $m \times m$ -matrices) have real rank zero.

**Example 1.4.** The minimal unital  $C^*$ -algebra  $L_A$  containing a given bounded self-adjoint operator  $A$  consists of normal operators  $f(A)$ , where  $f$  are continuous complex-valued functions on  $\sigma(A)$ . If there is an open interval  $(a, b) \subset \sigma(A)$  then  $A - \frac{a+b}{2}I \notin \overline{L^{-1} \cap L_s}$  and, consequently,  $L_A$  is not of real rank zero.

Our main results hold for  $C^*$ -algebras of real rank zero and operators  $A \in L$  satisfying the following condition

$$(C) \quad A - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}} \text{ for all } \lambda \in \mathbb{C}.$$

### 1.2. Auxiliary lemmas

We shall need the following simple lemmas.

**Lemma 1.5.** *Let  $\widehat{L}$  be the subset of the direct product  $\mathbb{C} \times L$  which consists of all pairs  $(\lambda, A)$  such that  $\lambda \notin \sigma(A)$ . If  $A_0 - \lambda_0 I \in L_0^{-1}$  for some  $(\lambda_0, A_0) \in \widehat{L}$  then  $A - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$  for all  $(\lambda, A)$  lying in the closure of the connected component of  $\widehat{L}$  that contains  $(\lambda_0, A_0)$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $\widehat{L}_0$  be the connected component of  $\widehat{L}$  containing  $(\lambda_0, A_0)$ . Since the set  $\widehat{L}$  is open,  $\widehat{L}_0$  is path-connected. If  $(\lambda, A) \in \widehat{L}_0$  and  $(\lambda_t, A_t) \subset \widehat{L}_0$  is a path in  $\widehat{L}_0$  from  $(\lambda_0, A_0)$  to  $(\lambda, A)$  then  $A_t - \lambda_t I \in L^{-1}$  for all  $t$ , which implies that  $A - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$ . If  $(\lambda, A)$  belongs to the closure of  $\widehat{L}_0$  then  $A - \lambda I$  can be approximated by operators  $A_n - \lambda_n I \in L_0^{-1}$  with  $(\lambda_n, A_n) \in \widehat{L}_0$ .  $\square$

*Remark 1.6.* If  $|\mu| > \|A\|$  then  $A - \mu I \in L_0^{-1}$  because  $[0, 1] \ni t \mapsto tA - \mu I$  is a path in  $L^{-1}$  from  $-\mu I \in L_0^{-1}$  to  $A - \mu I$ . Therefore, Lemma 1.5 implies that  $A$  satisfies the condition (C) whenever  $\mathbb{C} \setminus \sigma(A)$  is a dense connected subset of  $\mathbb{C}$ . In particular, (C) is fulfilled for all compact operators  $A \in L$ , all  $A \in L_s \cup L_f$ , and all unitary operators  $A \in L_u$  whose spectra do not coincide with the whole unit circle.

**Lemma 1.7.** *Let  $A \in L^{-1}$  and  $A = U|A|$ . Then  $A \in L_0^{-1}$  if and only if  $U \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$ .*

*Proof.*  $[0, 1] \ni t \mapsto U(tI + (1-t)|A|)$  is a path in  $L^{-1}$  from  $A$  to  $U$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 1.8.** *Assume that  $L$  has real rank zero. Then  $U \in L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$  if and only if for every  $\varepsilon \in (0, 1)$  there exist unitary operators  $U_\varepsilon, W_\varepsilon \in L_u$  such that  $U = W_\varepsilon U_\varepsilon$ ,  $-1 \notin \sigma(U_\varepsilon)$  and  $\|W_\varepsilon - I\| \leq \varepsilon$ .*

*Proof.* Recall that the point  $-1$  does not belong to the spectrum of  $U \in L_u$  if and only if  $U$  is the Cayley transform of a self-adjoint operator  $X$ , that is,  $U = (iI - X)^{-1}(iI + X)$  where  $X = i(U + I)^{-1}(U - I) \in L_s$ . For every such an operator  $U$ , the principal branch of the argument  $\text{Arg}$  is continuous in a neighbourhood of  $\sigma(U)$ , so that  $\text{Arg} U \in L_s$  and  $\exp(it \text{Arg} U)$  is a path in  $L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$  from  $I$  to  $U$ .

Assume first that  $U = W_\varepsilon U_\varepsilon$  where  $U_\varepsilon$  and  $W_\varepsilon$  satisfy the above conditions. Then  $U \in L_u$ ,  $-1 \notin \sigma(W_\varepsilon)$  and  $\exp(it \text{Arg} W_\varepsilon) \exp(it \text{Arg} U_\varepsilon)$  is a path in  $L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$  from  $I$  to  $U$ . Thus  $U \in L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$ .

Assume now that  $U \in L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$ . Then there exists a path  $Z(t) \subset L_0^{-1}$  from  $I$  to  $U$ . The “normalized” path  $\tilde{Z}(t) = Z(t)|Z(t)|^{-1}$  lies in  $L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$  and also joins  $I$  and  $U$ . Let us choose a finite collection of points

$$0 = t_0 < t_1 < t_2 < \dots < t_m = 1$$

such that  $\|\tilde{Z}(t_j) - \tilde{Z}(t_{j-1})\| < 1$  and define  $V_j := \tilde{Z}(t_j) \tilde{Z}^{-1}(t_{j-1})$ . Then  $U = V_m V_{m-1} \dots V_1$  and  $\|V_j - I\| < 1$ , so that  $-1 \notin \sigma(V_j)$  for all  $j$ .

Let  $V = (iI - Y)^{-1}(iI + Y)$  and  $\tilde{V} = (iI - \tilde{Y})^{-1}(iI + \tilde{Y})$  where  $Y, \tilde{Y} \in L_s$ . Since  $L$  has real rank zero, for each  $\delta > 0$  we can find  $Y_\delta \in L_s \cap L^{-1}$  such that  $\|Y - Y_\delta\| < \delta$ , and then  $\tilde{Y}_\delta \in L_s$  such that  $\|\tilde{Y} - \tilde{Y}_\delta\| < \delta$  and  $\tilde{Y}_\delta - Y_\delta^{-1} \in L^{-1}$ . If  $V_\delta = (iI - Y_\delta)^{-1}(iI + Y_\delta)$  and  $\tilde{V}_\delta = (iI - \tilde{Y}_\delta)^{-1}(iI + \tilde{Y}_\delta)$  then  $\|V_\delta \tilde{V}_\delta - V \tilde{V}\| \rightarrow 0$  as  $\delta \rightarrow 0$  because the function  $t \mapsto (iI - t)^{-1}(iI + t)$  is continuous. Also,  $-1 \notin \sigma(V_\delta \tilde{V}_\delta)$  because

$$\begin{aligned} (iI - Y_\delta)(V_\delta \tilde{V}_\delta + I)(iI - \tilde{Y}_\delta) &= (iI + Y_\delta)(iI + \tilde{Y}_\delta) + (iI - Y_\delta)(iI - \tilde{Y}_\delta) \\ &= 2(Y_\delta \tilde{Y}_\delta - I) = 2Y_\delta(\tilde{Y}_\delta - Y_\delta^{-1}) \in L^{-1}. \end{aligned}$$

Thus we see that the composition of two unitary operators whose spectra do not contain  $-1$  can be approximated by unitary operators with the same property. By induction, the same is true for the composition of any finite collection of unitary operators. In particular, there exists  $U_\varepsilon \in L_u \cap L_0^{-1}$  such that  $-1 \notin \sigma(U_\varepsilon)$  and  $\|U - U_\varepsilon\| < \varepsilon$ . Taking  $W_\varepsilon := U U_\varepsilon^{-1}$ , we obtain the required representation of  $U$ .  $\square$

**Lemma 1.9.** *Assume that  $L$  has real rank zero. Then*

- (1) *for every  $A \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$  and every  $\delta > 0$  there exists an operator  $S_\delta \in L_0^{-1}$  such that  $\|S_\delta^{-1}\| \leq \delta^{-1}$  and  $\|A - S_\delta\| \leq 2\delta$ .*
- (2) *If  $A \in L_s$  then one can find a self-adjoint operator  $S_\delta \in L^{-1}$  satisfying the above conditions.*
- (3) *For every  $S \in L_0^{-1}$  there exists a continuous path  $Z : [0, 1] \mapsto L_0^{-1}$  such that  $Z(0) = I$ ,  $Z(1) = S$ ,  $\|Z(t)^{-1}\| \leq \max\{1, \|S^{-1}\|\}$  for all  $t \in [0, 1]$  and*

$$\|Z(t) - Z(r)\| \leq |t - r| (1 + 2\pi) \max\{1, \|S\|\}, \quad \forall t, r \in [0, 1]. \quad (1.1)$$

*Proof.*

(1) Let us choose an arbitrary operator  $B \in L_0^{-1}$  such that  $\|A - B\| \leq \delta$ , and let  $B = V|B|$  be its polar decomposition. Then, by Lemma 1.7, we have  $V \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$  and  $S_\delta := V((|B| - \delta I)_+ + \delta I) \in L_0^{-1}$ . Obviously,  $\|S_\delta^{-1}\| = \|((|B| - \delta I)_+ + \delta I)^{-1}\| \leq \delta^{-1}$  and  $\|B - S_\delta\| = \|(|B| - \delta I)_+ + \delta I - |B|\| \leq \delta$ , so that  $\|A - S_\delta\| \leq 2\delta$ .

(2) If  $A \in L_s$  then there exists an operator  $B = V|B| \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_s$  such that  $\|A - B\| \leq \delta$ . As in (1), we can take  $S_\delta := V((|B| - \delta I)_+ + \delta I) \in L_s$ .

(3) Let  $S := U|S|$  be the polar representation of  $S$ . By Lemma 1.7,  $U \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$ . Therefore  $A := W_\varepsilon U_\varepsilon |S|$ , where  $W_\varepsilon$  and  $U_\varepsilon$  are unitary operators satisfying the conditions of Lemma 1.8.

Let us define  $Z_1(t) := \exp(it \operatorname{Arg} W_\varepsilon)$ ,  $Z_2(t) := \exp(it \operatorname{Arg} U_\varepsilon)$  and  $Z_3(t) := t|A_\delta| + (1-t)I$ , where  $t \in [0, 1]$ . Each  $Z_j(t)$  is a path in  $L_0^{-1}$ , and so is  $Z(t) := Z_1(t)Z_2(t)Z_3(t)$ . Obviously,  $Z(0) = I$ ,  $Z(1) = S$  and

$$\|Z(t)^{-1}\| = \|(t|S| + (1-t)I)^{-1}\| = (t\|S^{-1}\|^{-1} + (1-t))^{-1} \leq \max\{1, \|S^{-1}\|\}.$$

One can easily see that  $\|Z_1(t)\| = \|Z_2(t)\| = 1$ ,  $\|Z_3(t)\| \leq \max\{1, \|S\|\}$  and

$$\|Z_3(t) - Z_3(r)\| \leq |t - r| \max\{1, \|S\|\}.$$

Since  $|e^{it\theta} - e^{ir\theta}| \leq \pi|t - r|$  for all  $r, t \in \mathbb{R}$  and  $\theta \in (-\pi, \pi)$ , we also have  $\|Z_j(t) - Z_j(r)\| \leq \pi|t - r|$  for  $j = 1, 2$ . These inequalities imply (1.1).  $\square$

## 2. Main results

### 2.1. Resolution of the identity

The following theorem will be proved in Section 4. Roughly speaking, it says that a normal operator  $A \in L_n$  satisfying the condition **(C)** has a resolution of the identity in  $L$  associated with any finite open cover of  $\sigma(A)$ .

**Theorem 2.1.** *Assume that  $L$  has real rank zero. Let  $A \in L_n$ , and let  $\{\Omega_j\}_{j=1}^m$  be a finite open cover of  $\sigma(A)$ . If  $A$  satisfies the condition **(C)** then there exists a family of mutually orthogonal projections  $P_j \in L$  such that*

$$\sum_{j=1}^m P_j = I \quad \text{and} \quad P_j H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_j} H \quad \text{for all } j = 1, \dots, m, \quad (2.1)$$

where  $\Pi_{\Omega_j}$  are the spectral projections of  $A$  corresponding to the sets  $\Omega_j$ .

*Remark 2.2.* The operators  $P_j$  can be thought of as approximate spectral projections of  $A$ . If  $L$  is a von Neumann algebra then the spectral projections of  $A$  belong to  $L$  and one can simply take  $P_j = \Pi_{\Omega'_j}$ , where  $\{\Omega'_j\}_{j=1}^m$  is an arbitrary collection of mutually disjoint subsets  $\Omega'_j \subset \Omega_j$  covering  $\sigma(A)$ . However, even in this situation Theorem 2.1 may be useful, since the projections  $P_j$  constructed in the proof continuously depend on  $A$  in the norm topology.

The following simple lemma shows how Theorem 2.1 can be applied for approximation purposes.

**Lemma 2.3.** *Let  $A \in L_n$ , and let  $\{\Omega_j\}_{j=1}^m$  be a finite open cover of  $\sigma(A)$  whose multiplicity does not exceed  $k$ . If there exist mutually orthogonal projections  $P_j$  satisfying (2.1) then*

$$\|A - \sum_{j=1}^m z_j P_j\| \leq \sqrt{k} \max_j (\text{diam } \Omega_j) \quad (2.2)$$

for any collection of points  $z_j \in \Omega_j$ .

*Proof.* If  $z_j \in \Omega_j$  then

$$\begin{aligned} \|Au - \sum_{j=1}^m z_j P_j u\|^2 &= \sum_{j=1}^m \|P_j Au - z_j P_j u\|^2 \leq \sum_{j=1}^m \|\Pi_{\Omega_j}(Au - z_j u)\|^2 \\ &= \sum_{j=1}^m \|(A - z_j I) \Pi_{\Omega_j} u\|^2 \leq \sum_{j=1}^m \|\Pi_{\Omega_j} u\|^2 (\text{diam } \Omega_j)^2 \leq k \|u\|^2 \max_j (\text{diam } \Omega_j)^2 \end{aligned}$$

for all  $u \in H$ . Taking the supremum over  $u$ , we obtain (2.2).  $\square$

Theorem 2.2 and Lemma 2.3 imply the following corollaries.

**Corollary 2.4.** *The following statements are equivalent.*

- (1)  $A$   $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  has real rank zero.
- (2) Every self-adjoint operator  $A \in L_s$  has approximate spectral projections in the sense of Theorem 2.1, associated with any finite open cover of its spectrum.
- (3)  $L_s = \overline{L_f} \cap \overline{L_s}$ .

**Corollary 2.5.** *Assume that  $L$  has real rank zero. Then for every normal operator  $A \in L_n$  the following statements are equivalent.*

- (1) The operator  $A$  satisfies the condition **(C)**.
- (2) The operator  $A$  has approximate spectral projections in the sense of Theorem 2.1, associated with any finite open cover of its spectrum.
- (3)  $A \in \overline{L_f} \cap \overline{L_n}$ .

*Proof.* The corollaries are proved in the same manner.

By Remark 1.6, every self-adjoint operator  $A \in L_s$  satisfies the condition **(C)**. Therefore the implications (1)  $\Rightarrow$  (2) follow from Theorem 2.1.

Any subset of  $\mathbb{C}$  admits a cover  $\{\Omega_j\}_{j=1}^m$  of multiplicity four by open squares  $\Omega_j$  of arbitrarily small size. If  $A \in L_n$  has approximate spectral projections  $P_j$  associated with all such covers of its spectrum then, in view of (2.2), the

operator  $A$  can be approximated by operators of the form  $\sum_{j=1}^m z_j P_j \in L_f \cap L_n$ . Moreover, if  $A \in L_s$  then we can take  $z_j \in \mathbb{R}$ , so that  $\sum_{j=1}^m z_j P_j \in L_f \cap L_s$ . Thus (2)  $\Rightarrow$  (3).

Finally, in view of Remark 1.2, every operator  $T \in L_f \cap L_n$  can be written in the form  $\sum_{j=1}^m z_j \Pi_j$ , where  $z_j \in \mathbb{R}$  whenever  $T \in L_s$  and  $\Pi_j$  are mutually orthogonal projections lying in  $L$ . If  $A$  is approximated by a sequence of such operators then it can also be approximated by a sequence of operators  $\sum_{j=1}^m \tilde{z}_j \Pi_j$ , where  $\Pi_j$  are the same projections,  $\tilde{z}_j \neq 0$  and  $\text{Im } \tilde{z}_j = \text{Im } z_j$ . This shows that (3)  $\Rightarrow$  (1).  $\square$

*Remark 2.6.* The implications (1)  $\Leftrightarrow$  (3) in the above corollaries are known results (see Subsection 5.1 and [5, Theorem 3.2]). In [5], the authors explained that the part (1)  $\Rightarrow$  (3) of Corollary 2.5 would follow from the existence of projections ‘that approximately commute with  $A$  and approximately divide  $\sigma(A)$  into disjoint components’. The implications (1)  $\Rightarrow$  (2)  $\Rightarrow$  (3) in Corollary 2.5 give a precise meaning to their statement.

## 2.2. The main theorem

In this subsection

- $B(r) := \{T \in L : \|T\| \leq r\}$  is the closed ball about the origin in  $L$  of radius  $r$ ;
- $M_T$  denotes the convex hull of the set  $\bigcup_{S_1, S_2 \in B(1)} S_1 T S_2$ , where  $T \in L$ ;
- $J_T$  is the two-sided ideal in  $L$  generated by the operator  $T \in L$ .

*Remark 2.7.* The ideal  $J_T$  consists of all finite linear combinations of operators of the form  $S_1 T S_2$  where  $S_1, S_2 \in L$ . Therefore,  $M_T \subset J_T \cap B(\|T\|)$  and  $J_T = \bigcup_{t \geq 0} t M_T$ .

*Remark 2.8.* The unit ball  $B(1)$  coincides with the closed convex hull of  $L_u$  (see, for example, [7]). This implies that  $M_T$  is a subset of the closed convex hull of the set  $\bigcup_{U, V \in L_u} U T V$ . Moreover, if  $\overline{L^{-1}} = L$  then  $B(1)$  coincides with the convex hull of  $L_u$  (see [8]) and, consequently, every element of  $M_T$  is a finite convex combination of operators of the form  $U T V$  with  $U, V \in L_u$ .

We shall say that a continuous real valued function  $f$  satisfies the condition  $(C_{\varepsilon, r})$  for some  $\varepsilon, r > 0$  if  $f$  is defined on the interval  $[-r - \varepsilon, r + \varepsilon]$  and

$(C_{\varepsilon, r})$  there exists  $\varepsilon' \in (0, \varepsilon)$  such that the set  $\{x \in \mathbb{R} : f(x) = y\}$  is an  $\varepsilon'$ -net in  $\{x \in \mathbb{R} : x^2 + y^2 \leq (r + \varepsilon)^2\}$  for each  $y \in [-r - \varepsilon, r + \varepsilon]$ .

The condition  $(C_{\varepsilon, r})$  is fulfilled whenever the function  $f$  sufficiently rapidly oscillates between  $-r - \varepsilon$  and  $r + \varepsilon$ . In particular, it holds for the function  $f(x) = (r + \varepsilon) \cos(\pi x / \varepsilon)$ .

**Lemma 2.9.** *Let  $L$  have real rank zero, and let  $X, Y \in L_s$  be self-adjoint operators such that the operator  $A := X + iY$  satisfies the condition **(C)**. Then, for every function  $f$  satisfying the condition  $(C_{\varepsilon, r})$  with  $r = \|A\|$ , the operator  $Y$  belongs to the closure of the set  $f(X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s) + J_{[X, Y]} \cap L_s$ .*

*Proof.* Assume first that  $J_{[X, Y]} = \{0\}$ , so that  $A$  is normal. By Corollary 2.5, for each  $\delta \in (0, \varepsilon]$  there exists an operator  $A_\delta \in L_n \cap L_f$  with finite spectrum  $\sigma(A_\delta) = \{z_1, \dots, z_m\}$  such that  $\|A - A_\delta\| \leq \delta$  and, consequently,  $|z_j| \leq r + \delta$  for all  $j$ . In view of  $(C_{\varepsilon, r})$ , one can find real numbers  $\varepsilon_k \in [-\varepsilon', \varepsilon']$  such that  $z_k + \varepsilon_k$  lie on the graph of  $f$  for all  $k = 1, \dots, m$ . Let  $A'_\delta$  be the operator with eigenvalues  $z_k + \varepsilon_k$  and the same spectral projections as  $A_\delta$ . Then  $\text{Im } A'_\delta = f(\text{Re } A'_\delta)$ ,  $\|Y - \text{Im } A'_\delta\| \leq \delta$  and  $\|X - \text{Re } A'_\delta\| \leq \delta + \varepsilon'$ . This implies that

$$(Y + B(\delta)) \cap f(X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s) \neq \emptyset, \quad \forall \delta \in (0, \varepsilon - \varepsilon'].$$

Letting  $\delta \rightarrow 0$ , we see that  $Y \in \overline{f(X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s)}$ .

Assume now that  $J_{[X, Y]} \neq \{0\}$  and denote  $L' := \overline{J_{[X, Y]}}$ . Let us consider the quotient  $C^*$ -algebra  $L/L'$  and the corresponding quotient map  $\pi : L \mapsto L/L'$ . Since the map  $\pi$  is continuous and  $\pi S = \pi(S + S^*)/2$  for all self-adjoint elements  $\pi S \in L/L'$ , the quotient algebra also has real rank zero and  $\pi S \in \overline{(L/L')_0^{-1}}$  whenever  $S \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$ . The latter implies that the normal element  $\pi A$  of the quotient algebra  $L/L'$  also satisfies the condition **(C)**.

Applying the previous result with  $\varepsilon$  replaced by an arbitrary  $\varepsilon_0 \in (\varepsilon', \varepsilon)$  to  $\pi A = \pi X + i\pi Y$ , we can find a sequence of operators  $X_n \in L_s$  such that  $f(\pi X_n) \rightarrow \pi Y$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$  and  $\|\pi X - \pi X_n\| \leq \varepsilon_0$  for all  $n$ . Since  $\|T\| \geq \|\text{Re } T\|$  for all  $T \in L$ , we have

$$\|\pi T\| := \inf_{R \in L'} \|T - R\| = \inf_{R \in L' \cap L_s} \|T - R\|, \quad \forall T \in L_s. \quad (2.3)$$

Therefore, there exist operators  $R_n \in L' \cap L_s$  such that  $X_n + R_n \in X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s$ . Since  $f$  can be uniformly approximated by polynomials on any compact subset of  $\mathbb{R}$  and  $Q(\pi X_n) = \pi Q(X_n)$  for any polynomial  $Q$ , we have

$$f(\pi X_n) = f(\pi(X_n + R_n)) = \pi f(X_n + R_n)$$

and, consequently,  $\|\pi(f(X_n + R_n) - Y)\| \rightarrow 0$ . In view of (2.3), there exist operators  $\tilde{R}_n \in L' \cap L_s$  such that  $f(X_n + R_n) + \tilde{R}_n \rightarrow Y$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . This implies that  $Y$  belongs to the closure of the set  $f(X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s) + L' \cap L_s$  which coincides with  $\overline{f(X + B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s) + J_{[X, Y]} \cap L_s}$ .  $\square$

**Corollary 2.10.** *Assume that  $L$  has real rank zero. If  $A \in L$  satisfies **(C)** then*

$$A \in \overline{B(\|A\|) \cap L_n + J_{[A^*, A]} \cap L_s}. \quad (2.4)$$

*Proof.* Let  $r := \|A\|$ . Given  $\varepsilon > 0$ , let us choose a function  $f_\varepsilon$  satisfying the condition  $(C_{\varepsilon,r})$  whose graph lies in the disc  $\{x^2 + y^2 \leq (r + \varepsilon)^2\}$ . Applying Lemma 2.9, we can find an operator  $X_\varepsilon \in \text{Re } A + \text{B}(\varepsilon) \cap L_s$  such that  $\text{Im } A \in f_\varepsilon(X_\varepsilon) + J_{[A^*,A]} \cap L_s + \text{B}(\varepsilon) \cap L_s$ . The operator  $\tilde{A}_\varepsilon := X_\varepsilon + i f_\varepsilon(X_\varepsilon)$  is normal, and  $A - \tilde{A}_\varepsilon \in J_{[A^*,A]} \cap L_s + \text{B}(2\varepsilon) \cap L_s$ . Therefore, there exist operators  $R_\varepsilon \in J_{[A^*,A]} \cap L_s$  such that  $\tilde{A}_\varepsilon + R_\varepsilon \rightarrow A$  as  $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$ . Since  $x^2 + (f(x))^2 \leq (r + \varepsilon)^2$ , we have

$$\|\tilde{A}_\varepsilon\|^2 = \|X_\varepsilon\|^2 + \|f_\varepsilon(X_\varepsilon)\|^2 \leq (r + \varepsilon)^2.$$

If  $A_\varepsilon := r(r + \varepsilon)^{-1} \tilde{A}_\varepsilon$  then, by the above,  $A_\varepsilon \in \text{B}(r) \cap L_n$  and  $A_\varepsilon + R_\varepsilon \rightarrow A$  as  $\varepsilon \rightarrow 0$ .  $\square$

*Remark 2.11.* By Corollary 2.10,  $\overline{L_n + L'} = \overline{L_n + L' \cap L_s}$  for any two-sided ideal  $L' \subset L$  in a  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  of real rank zero. Indeed, if  $A \in L_n + L'$  then  $J_{[A^*,A]} \subset L'$  and, in view of (2.4),  $A$  can be approximated by operators from  $L_n + L' \cap L_s$ .

The following refinement of Corollary 2.10 is the main result of the paper.

**Theorem 2.12.** *There is a nonincreasing function  $h : (0, \infty) \mapsto [0, \infty)$  such that  $h(\varepsilon) = 0$  for all  $\varepsilon \geq 1$  and*

$$A \in \text{B}(\|A\|) \cap L_n + h(\varepsilon) M_{[A^*,A]} \cap L_s + \text{B}(\varepsilon) \quad (2.5)$$

for all  $\varepsilon \in (0, \infty)$ , all  $C^*$ -algebras  $L$  of real rank zero and all operators  $A \in \text{B}(1)$  satisfying the condition **(C)**.

*Remark 2.13.* In other words, the inclusion (2.5) means that for each  $\varepsilon > 0$  there exist a normal operator  $T(\varepsilon) \in L_n$  and a finite linear combination

$$S(\varepsilon) = \sum_j c(j, \varepsilon) S_1(j, \varepsilon) [A^*, A] S_2(j, \varepsilon) \quad (2.6)$$

with  $S_k(j, \varepsilon) \in L$  and  $c(j, \varepsilon) \in (0, 1]$  such that  $\|T(\varepsilon)\| \leq \|A\|$ ,  $S(\varepsilon) \in L_s$ ,  $\|S_k(j, \varepsilon)\| \leq 1$ ,  $\sum_j c(j, \varepsilon) = 1$  and

$$\|A - T(\varepsilon) - h(\varepsilon) S(\varepsilon)\| \leq \varepsilon.$$

Note that (2.6) can be written as a linear combination of self-adjoint operators,

$$S(\varepsilon) = \sum_j c(j, \varepsilon) (S_+^*(j, \varepsilon) [A^*, A] S_+(j, \varepsilon) - S_-^*(j, \varepsilon) [A^*, A] S_-(j, \varepsilon)) \quad (2.7)$$

where  $\|S_\pm(j, \varepsilon)\| \leq 1$ . Indeed, if  $S_\pm(j, \varepsilon) := \frac{1}{2} (S_1^*(j, \varepsilon) \pm S_2(j, \varepsilon))$  then the real part of each term in the right hand side of (2.6) coincides with corresponding term in (2.7).

*Proof.* Let us consider a family of  $C^*$ -algebras  $L_\xi$  of real rank zero parameterised by  $\xi \in \Xi$ , where  $\Xi$  is an arbitrary index set, and let  $\mathcal{L}$  be their direct product. By definition, the  $C^*$ -algebra  $\mathcal{L}$  consists of families  $\mathcal{S} = \{S_\xi\}$  with  $S_\xi \in L_\xi$  such that  $\|\mathcal{S}\|_{\mathcal{L}} := \sup_{\xi \in \Xi} \|S_\xi\| < \infty$ ,  $\mathcal{S}^* := \{S_\xi^*\}$  and  $\mathcal{S}\tilde{\mathcal{S}} = \{S_\xi\tilde{S}_\xi\}$ . Let  $B_{\mathcal{L}}(r)$  and  $B_\xi(r)$  be the balls of radius  $r$  about the origin in  $\mathcal{L}$  and  $L_\xi$  respectively.

In view of Lemma 1.9(2),  $\mathcal{L}$  has real rank zero. Lemma 1.9(3) implies that  $\{S_\xi\} \in \mathcal{L}_0^{-1}$  whenever  $\{S_\xi\} \in \mathcal{L}$ ,  $S_\xi \in (L_\xi)_0^{-1}$  for each  $\xi \in \Xi$  and  $\sup_{\xi \in \Xi} \|S_\xi^{-1}\| < \infty$ . From here and Lemma 1.9(1) it follows that  $\mathcal{A} = \{A_\xi\} \in \mathcal{L}$  satisfies the condition **(C)** whenever all the operators  $A_\xi$  satisfy **(C)**.

Let us fix  $\varepsilon \in (0, 1)$  and consider an arbitrary family  $\mathcal{A} = \{A_\xi\} \in \mathcal{L}$  of operators  $A_\xi \in L_\xi$  satisfying **(C)**. Applying Corollary 2.10 to  $\mathcal{A}$ , we can find families of operators  $\mathcal{T}_\varepsilon = \{T_{\xi,\varepsilon}\} \in B_{\mathcal{L}}(\|\mathcal{A}\|_{\mathcal{L}}) \cap \mathcal{L}_n$  and  $\mathcal{R}_\varepsilon = \{R_{\xi,\varepsilon}\} \in J_{[\mathcal{A}^*, \mathcal{A}]} \cap \mathcal{L}_s$  such that  $\|\mathcal{A} - \mathcal{T}_\varepsilon - \mathcal{R}_\varepsilon\|_{\mathcal{L}} \leq \varepsilon$ . The estimate for the norm holds if and only if  $A_\xi - T_{\xi,\varepsilon} - R_{\xi,\varepsilon} \in B_\xi(\varepsilon)$  for all  $\xi \in \Xi$ . The inclusion  $\mathcal{T}_\varepsilon \in B_{\mathcal{L}}(\|\mathcal{A}\|_{\mathcal{L}}) \cap \mathcal{L}_n$  means that  $T_{\xi,\varepsilon} \in B_\xi(\|\mathcal{A}\|_{\mathcal{L}}) \cap (L_\xi)_n$  for all  $\xi \in \Xi$ . Finally, by Remark 2.7,  $J_{[\mathcal{A}^*, \mathcal{A}]} = \bigcup_{t \geq 0} tM_{[\mathcal{A}^*, \mathcal{A}]}$ . This identity and the inclusion  $\mathcal{R}_\varepsilon \in J_{[\mathcal{A}^*, \mathcal{A}]} \cap \mathcal{L}_s$  imply that  $R_{\xi,\varepsilon} \in tM_{[A_\xi^*, A_\xi]} \cap (L_\xi)_s$  for all  $\xi \in \Xi$  and some  $t$  independent of  $\xi$ . Thus we obtain

$$A_\xi \in B_\xi(\|\mathcal{A}\|_{\mathcal{L}}) \cap (L_\xi)_n + tM_{[A_\xi^*, A_\xi]} \cap (L_\xi)_s + B_\xi(\varepsilon), \quad \forall \xi \in \Xi, \quad (2.8)$$

where  $t$  is a nonnegative number which does not depend on  $\xi$ .

If (2.5) were not true for any  $h(\varepsilon) \in [0, \infty)$  then there would exist families of  $C^*$ -algebras  $L_\xi$  and operators  $A_\xi \in L_\xi$  satisfying the condition **(C)**, for which (2.8) would not hold with any  $t$  independent of  $\xi$ . However, by the above, it is not possible. Thus we have (2.5) with some function  $h$  for all  $\varepsilon \in (0, 1)$ . Since  $A \in B(1)$ , we can extend  $h(\varepsilon)$  by zero for  $\varepsilon \geq 1$ . It remains to notice that the function  $h$  can be chosen nonincreasing because the same inclusion holds for  $\tilde{h}(\varepsilon) := \sup_{t \geq \varepsilon} h(t)$ .  $\square$

If  $t \in [0, \infty)$ , let

$$F(t) := \inf_{\varepsilon > 0} (h(\varepsilon)t + \varepsilon), \quad (2.9)$$

where  $h$  is the function introduced in Theorem 2.12. The function  $F$  is non-decreasing,  $F(0) = 0$  and  $0 < F(t) \leq 1$  for all  $t > 0$ . Since the subgraph of  $F$  coincides with an intersection of half-planes,  $F$  is concave and, consequently, continuous.

**Corollary 2.14.** *Let  $L$  be a  $C^*$ -algebra of real rank zero, and let  $\|\cdot\|_\star$  be a continuous seminorm on  $L$  such that*

$$\|USV\|_\star \leq \|S\|_\star \text{ and } \|S\|_\star \leq C_\star \|S\| \text{ for all } S \in L \text{ and all } U, V \in L_u, \quad (2.10)$$

where  $C_\star$  is a positive constant. Then

$$\inf_{T \in L_n : \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\|_\star \leq C_\star F(C_\star^{-1} \|[A^*, A]\|_\star) \quad (2.11)$$

for all operators  $A \in B(1)$  satisfying the condition **(C)**.

*Proof.* In view of Remark 2.8, from the inequalities (2.10) it follows that

$$\|S_1 S S_2\|_* \leq \|S_1\| \|S\|_* \|S_2\| \quad \text{for all } S, S_1, S_2 \in L \quad (2.12)$$

and, consequently,  $\|S\|_* \leq \|[A^*, A]\|_*$  for all  $S \in M_{[A^*, A]}$ . Since  $\|R\|_* \leq C_* \|R\| \leq \varepsilon C_*$  for all  $R \in B(\varepsilon)$ , the inclusion (2.5) implies that

$$\inf_{T \in L_n: \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\|_* \leq h(\varepsilon) \|[A^*, A]\|_* + \varepsilon C_*, \quad \forall \varepsilon > 0.$$

Taking the infimum over  $\varepsilon > 0$ , we obtain (2.11).  $\square$

*Remark 2.15.* It is clear from the proof that (2.11) can be extended to general functions  $\|\cdot\|_* : L \mapsto \mathbb{R}_+$  satisfying (2.10) and suitable quasiconvexity conditions.

**Example 2.16.** Let  $J$  be a two-sided ideal in  $L$ . Then the seminorm  $\|A\|_* := \text{dist}(A, J)$  satisfies the conditions (2.10) with  $C_* = 1$ . Corollary 2.14 implies that

$$\text{dist}(A, J + B(\|A\|) \cap L_n) \leq F(\text{dist}([A^*, A], J)) \quad (2.13)$$

for all  $A \in B(1)$  satisfying the condition **(C)**.

### 3. Applications

Throughout this section

- $\mathcal{C}(H)$  is the  $C^*$ -algebra of compact operators in  $H$ ;
- $\mathcal{S}_p$  are the Schatten classes of compact operators and
- $\|\cdot\|_p$  are the corresponding norms (we shall always be assuming that  $p \geq 1$ );
- $\|A\|_{\text{ess}} := \inf_{K \in \mathcal{C}(H)} \|A - K\|$  is the distance from  $A$  to  $\mathcal{C}(H)$ ;
- $F$  is the function defined by (2.9).

#### 3.1. Matrices

Let  $L$  be the linear space of all complex  $m \times m$  matrices. Then the Schatten norms  $\|\cdot\|_p$  on  $L$  satisfy (2.10) with  $C_* = m^{1/p}$ . Corollary 2.14 implies that

$$\inf_{T \in L_n} \|A - T\| \leq \inf_{T \in L_n: \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\| \leq F(\|[A^*, A]\|) \quad (3.1)$$

and

$$\inf_{T \in L_n} \|A - T\|_p \leq \inf_{T \in L_n: \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\|_p \leq m^{1/p} F(m^{-1/p} \|[A^*, A]\|_p) \quad (3.2)$$

for all  $p \in [1, \infty)$ , all  $m = 1, 2, \dots$  and all  $A \in L$  such that  $\|A\| \leq 1$ .

Note that the  $\mathcal{S}_2$ -distance from a given  $m \times m$ -matrix  $A$  to the set of normal matrices admits the following simple description.

**Lemma 3.1.** *Let  $A$  be an  $m \times m$ -matrix, and let  $\Sigma_m(A)$  be the set of all complex vectors  $\mathbf{z} \in \mathbb{C}^m$  of the form*

$$\mathbf{z} = \{(Au_1, u_1), (Au_2, u_2) \dots, (Au_m, u_m)\}$$

where  $\{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_m\}$  is an orthonormal basis. Then

$$\inf_{T \in L_n} \|A - T\|_2^2 = \inf_{T \in L_n: \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\|_2^2 = \|A\|_2^2 - \sup_{\mathbf{z} \in \Sigma_m(A)} |\mathbf{z}|^2. \quad (3.3)$$

*Proof.* If  $T$  is an arbitrary normal matrix and  $\{u_1, u_2, \dots, u_m\}$  is the basis formed by its eigenvectors then

$$\|A - T\|_2^2 \geq \sum_{j \neq k} |(Au_j, u_k)|^2 = \|A\|_2^2 - \sum_{j=1}^m |(Au_j, u_j)|^2 \geq \|A\|_2^2 - \sup_{\mathbf{z} \in \Sigma_m(A)} |\mathbf{z}|^2. \quad (3.4)$$

Therefore  $\inf_{T \in L_n} \|A - T\|_2^2 \geq \|A\|_2^2 - \sup_{\mathbf{z} \in \Sigma_m(A)} |\mathbf{z}|^2$ .

On the other hand, since the set  $\Sigma_m(A)$  is compact,  $\sup_{\mathbf{z} \in \Sigma_m(A)} |\mathbf{z}|^2 = |\mathbf{z}_0|^2$  for some  $\mathbf{z}_0 \in \Sigma_m(A)$ . Let us write down the matrix  $A$  in a corresponding orthonormal basis  $\{v_1, \dots, v_m\}$  and denote by  $T_0$  the normal matrix obtained by removing the off-diagonal elements. Then  $\|T_0\| \leq \|A\|$  and  $\|A - T_0\|_2^2 = \sum_{j \neq k} |(Av_j, v_k)|^2 = \|A\|_2^2 - |\mathbf{z}_0|^2$ .  $\square$

The following example shows that for  $p = 2$  the estimate (3.2) is order sharp as  $m \rightarrow \infty$ .

**Example 3.2.** Let  $m$  be even, and let  $\{e_j\}_{j=1}^m$  be the standard Euclidean basis in  $\mathbb{C}^m$ . Consider the  $m \times m$ -matrix

$$A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 & 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \cdot & \dots & \cdot & \cdot \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

defined by the identities  $Ae_{2i} = e_{2i-1}$  and  $Ae_{2i-1} = 0$ , where  $i = 1, \dots, m/2$ . By direct calculation,  $\|A\| = 1$  and  $[A, A^*] = \text{diag}(1, -1, \dots, 1, -1)$ , so that  $\|[A, A^*]\|_2 = m^{1/2}$ .

For this matrix  $A$ ,

$$\inf_{T \in L_n} \|A - T\|_2 = (m/4)^{1/2} = m^{1/2} (2^{-1} m^{-1/2} \|[A, A^*]\|_2).$$

Indeed, let  $\{u_j\}_{j=1}^m$  be an orthonormal basis in  $\mathbb{C}^m$ . Then

$$u_j = \sum_{i=1}^{m/2} (\alpha_{i,j} e_{2i-1} + \beta_{i,j} e_{2i}),$$

where  $\alpha_{i,j}$  and  $\beta_{i,j}$  are complex numbers such that  $\sum_{i=1}^{m/2} (|\alpha_{i,j}|^2 + |\beta_{i,j}|^2) = 1$ . Clearly,

$$(Au_j, u_j) = \sum_{i=1}^{m/2} (\beta_{i,j} e_{2i-1}, u_j) = \sum_{i=1}^{m/2} \beta_{i,j} \overline{\alpha_{i,j}}.$$

Therefore

$$2 |(Au_j, u_j)| \leq \sum_{i=1}^{m/2} (|\alpha_{i,j}|^2 + |\beta_{i,j}|^2) = 1$$

and, consequently,  $\sum_{j=1}^{m/2} |(Au_j, u_j)|^2 \leq m/4$ . Thus we have  $|z|^2 \leq m/4$  for all  $z \in \Sigma_m(A)$ . Since  $\|A\|_2^2 = m/2$ , Lemma 3.1 implies that  $\|A - T\|_2^2 \geq m/4$  for all normal matrices  $T$ . On the other hand, if  $T_0 = \operatorname{Re} A$  then  $\|A - T_0\|_2^2 = \|\operatorname{Im} A\|_2^2 = m/4$ .

*Remark 3.3.* If  $T$  is a normal matrix and  $A$  is an arbitrary matrix of the same size then

$$[A^*, A] = [A^*, T] + [A^*, A - T] = [(A - T)^*, T] + [A^*, (A - T)].$$

Estimating the Schatten norms of the right and left hand sides, we obtain

$$\|[A^*, A]\|_p \leq 2 (\|A\| + \|T\|) \|A - T\|_p.$$

This implies that

$$\inf_{T \in L_n : \|T\| \leq \|A\|} \|A - T\|_p \geq \frac{\|[A^*, A]\|_p}{4\|A\|} \quad (3.5)$$

for all finite matrices  $A$  and all  $p \in [1, \infty]$ .

Substituting the matrix  $A$  from Example 3.2 into (3.5), we see that the second estimate (3.2) is order sharp as  $m \rightarrow \infty$  for all  $p \in [1, \infty]$ .

### 3.2. Bounded and compact operators

If  $L$  is the  $C^*$ -algebra obtained from  $\mathcal{C}(H)$  by adjoining the unity then, by Remark 1.6,  $L^{-1} = L_0^{-1}$  and all  $A \in L$  satisfy the condition **(C)**. Thus our main results hold for all compact operators  $A$ .

If  $L = \mathcal{B}(H)$  then  $L^{-1} = L_0^{-1}$  because every unitary operator can be joined with  $I$  by the path  $\exp(it \operatorname{Arg} U)$  (see Lemma 1.7). However, in the infinite dimensional case  $\overline{L^{-1}} \neq \mathcal{B}(H)$ . The following result was obtained in [9] (it also follows from [10, Theorem 4.1] or [11, Theorem 3]).

**Lemma 3.4.** *Let  $H$  be separable, and let  $L = \mathcal{B}(H)$ . Then an operator  $A$  satisfies the condition **(C)** if and only if for each  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$  either the range of  $(A - \lambda I)$  is not closed or  $\dim \ker(A - \lambda I) = \dim \ker(A^* - \bar{\lambda} I)$ .*

In other words, Lemma 3.4 states that in the separable case **(C)** is equivalent to the condition on the index function in the BDF theorem. In particular, this implies that normal operators and their compact perturbations satisfy the condition **(C)**.

*Remark 3.5.* An explicit description of the closure of the set of invertible operators in a nonseparable Hilbert space was obtained in [12].

### 3.3. The BDF theorem

In this subsection we are always assuming that  $H$  is separable and  $L = \mathcal{B}(H)$ .

Recall that an operator  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  is called *quasidiagonal* if it can be represented as the sum of a block diagonal and a compact operator, that is, if there exist mutually orthogonal finite dimensional subspaces  $H_k$  and operators  $S_k : H_k \mapsto H_k$  such that  $H = \bigoplus_{k=1}^{\infty} H_k$  and  $A = \text{diag}\{S_1, S_2, \dots\} + K$ , where  $K \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ .

We shall need the following well known result.

**Lemma 3.6.** *The set of compact perturbations of normal operators on a separable Hilbert space is norm closed and coincides with the set of quasidiagonal operators  $S \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  such that  $[S^*, S] \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ .*

Lemma 3.6 follows from the BDF theorem but it also admits a simple independent proof based on Theorem 0.2 (see [5, Proposition 2.8]). Obviously, the BDF theorem is an immediate consequence of Corollary 2.10 and Lemma 3.6. One obtains a slightly better result by applying the following lemma, which shows that the BDF theorem holds with a normal operator  $T$  such that  $\|T\| \leq \|A\|$ .

**Lemma 3.7.** *Let  $H$  be separable, and let  $L = \mathcal{B}(H)$ . Then, for each fixed  $r > 0$ , the set  $B(r) \cap L_n + \mathcal{C}(H)$  is closed and coincides with the set of quasidiagonal operators of the form  $\text{diag}\{S_1, S_2, \dots\} + K$  such that  $K \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ ,  $S_k$  are normal and  $\|S_k\| \leq r$  for all  $k$ .*

*Proof.* Obviously, if  $A = \text{diag}\{S_1, S_2, \dots\} + K$  then  $A \in B(r) \cap L_n + \mathcal{C}(H)$  whenever  $S_k$  and  $K$  satisfy the conditions of the lemma.

Assume now that  $A \in B(r) \cap L_n + \mathcal{C}(H)$ . Then  $\|A\|_{\text{ess}} \leq r$ ,  $[A^*, A] \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and, by Lemma 3.6,  $A = \text{diag}\{S'_1, S'_2, \dots\} + K'$ , where  $K' \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and  $S'_k$  are operators acting in some mutually orthogonal finite dimensional subspaces  $H_k$  such that  $H = \bigoplus_k H_k$ . Since the self-commutator  $[A^*, A]$  is compact, we have  $[(S'_k)^*, S'_k] \rightarrow 0$  as  $k \rightarrow \infty$ . By (3.1), there are normal operators  $S''_k : H_k \mapsto H_k$  such that  $\|S'_k - S''_k\| \rightarrow 0$  as  $k \rightarrow \infty$ . The operator  $\text{diag}\{S'_1 - S''_1, S'_2 - S''_2, \dots\}$  is compact, so that  $A = \text{diag}\{S''_1, S''_2, \dots\} + K''$  where  $K'' \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ .

Since  $\|A\|_{\text{ess}} \leq r$ , we have  $\limsup_{k \rightarrow \infty} \|S_k''\| \leq r$ . Define

$$S_k := \begin{cases} S_k'', & \text{if } \|S_k''\| \leq r, \\ r \|S_k''\|^{-1} S_k'', & \text{if } \|S_k''\| > r. \end{cases}$$

Clearly,  $S_k$  are normal and  $\|S_k\| \leq r$ . The estimate for the upper limit implies that

$$\limsup_{k \rightarrow \infty} \|S_k'' - S_k\| = \limsup_{k \rightarrow \infty} (\|S_k''\| - r)_+ = 0.$$

It follows that the operator  $\text{diag}\{S_1'' - S_1, S_2'' - S_2, \dots\}$  is compact and, consequently,  $A = \text{diag}\{S_1, S_2, \dots\} + K$  where  $K \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ .  $\square$

Theorem 2.12 and Lemma 3.7 also imply the following quantitative version of the BDF theorem.

**Theorem 3.8.** *Let  $H$  be separable, and let  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  be an operator with  $\|A\| \leq 1$  satisfying the condition (C).*

- (1) *If  $[A^*, A] \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  then for each  $\varepsilon > 0$  there exists a diagonal operator  $T_\varepsilon \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  such that  $A - T_\varepsilon \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ ,  $\|T_\varepsilon\| \leq \|A\|$  and*

$$\|A - T_\varepsilon\| \leq F(\|[A^*, A]\|) + \varepsilon.$$

- (2) *If  $[A^*, A] \notin \mathcal{C}(H)$  then for each  $\varepsilon > 0$  there exists a diagonal operator  $T_\varepsilon \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  such that  $\|A - T_\varepsilon\|_{\text{ess}} \leq 2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})$  and*

$$\|A - T_\varepsilon\| \leq 5F(\|[A^*, A]\|) + 3F\left(2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})\right) + \varepsilon.$$

*Proof.* Since a block diagonal normal operator is represented by a diagonal matrix in the orthonormal basis formed by its eigenvectors, it is sufficient to construct a block diagonal normal  $T_\varepsilon$  satisfying the above conditions.

Assume first that  $[A^*, A] \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ . Then, by Corollary 2.10 and Lemma 3.7, we have  $A = \text{diag}\{S_1, S_2, \dots\} + K$ , where  $K \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and  $S_k$  are normal operators in finite dimensional subspaces  $H_k$  such that  $\|S_k\| \leq \|A\|$ . Let us denote by  $E_n$  the orthogonal projections onto the subspaces  $\bigoplus_{k=1}^n H_k$  and define  $\delta_n := \|K - E_n K E_n\|$ . Since

$$\begin{aligned} [(E_n A E_n)^*, E_n A E_n] &= E_n (A^* E_n A - A E_n A^*) E_n \\ &= E_n (A^* [E_n, A] + [A^*, A] + A [A^*, E_n]) E_n, \end{aligned}$$

$$[E_n, A] E_n = [E_n, K] E_n = (E_n K E_n - K) E_n$$

and  $[A^*, E_n] E_n = (K^* - E_n K^* E_n) E_n$ , we have

$$\|[(E_n A E_n)^*, E_n A E_n]\| \leq \|[A^*, A]\| + 2\delta_n \|A\| \leq \|[A^*, A]\| + 2\delta_n.$$

Applying (3.1) to the finite rank operators  $E_n A E_n$ , we can find normal operators  $A_n$  acting in  $E_n H$  such that  $\|A_n\| \leq \|E_n A E_n\| \leq \|A\|$  and

$$\|E_n A E_n - A_n\| \leq F(\|[A^*, A]\| + 2\delta_n) + \delta_n.$$

The block diagonal operators  $\tilde{T}_n := A_n \oplus \text{diag}\{S_{n+1}, S_{n+2}, \dots\}$  are normal,  $\|\tilde{T}_n\| \leq \|A\|$  and

$$A - \tilde{T}_n = (E_n A E_n - A_n) + (K - E_n K E_n), \quad \forall n = 1, 2, \dots$$

The above identity implies that  $A - \tilde{T}_n \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and

$$\|A - \tilde{T}_n\| \leq F(\|[A^*, A]\| + 2\delta_n) + 2\delta_n, \quad \forall n = 1, 2, \dots$$

Since  $K$  is compact,  $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \delta_n = 0$  and, consequently,  $\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \|A - \tilde{T}_n\| = F(\|[A^*, A]\|)$ . Thus we can take  $T_\varepsilon := \tilde{T}_n$  with a sufficiently large  $n$ .

Assume now that  $\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}} > 0$ . From (2.13) with  $J = \mathcal{C}(H)$  it follows that

$$A = S + K + R,$$

where  $S$  is a bounded normal operator,  $K \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and  $R$  is a bounded operator with  $\|R\| \leq 2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})$ . Since  $|F| \leq 1$ , we have  $\|S + K\| \leq 3$ .

Let  $A' := \frac{1}{3}(S + K)$ . Then  $[(A')^*, A'] \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ ,  $\|A'\| \leq 1$  and, in view of Lemma 3.4,  $A'$  satisfies the condition **(C)**. Applying (1) to  $A'$ , we can find a block diagonal normal operator  $T'_\varepsilon$  and a compact operators  $K'_\varepsilon$  such that  $A' = T'_\varepsilon + K'_\varepsilon$  and  $\|K'_\varepsilon\| \leq F(\|[(A')^*, A']\|) + \varepsilon/3$ . The identities  $3A' = S + K = A - R$  and the above estimates for  $\|A\|$ ,  $\|R\|$  and  $\|S + K\|$  imply that

$$\begin{aligned} \|[(A')^*, A']\| &\leq \frac{1}{3} (\|[A^*, A]\| + 2\|R\| \|S + K\| + 2\|A\| \|R\|) \\ &\leq \|[A^*, A]\| + 2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}}). \end{aligned}$$

Obviously,  $A = 3T'_\varepsilon + 3K'_\varepsilon + R$  and  $\|A - 3T'_\varepsilon\|_{\text{ess}} = \|R\|_{\text{ess}} \leq 2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})$ . Since  $\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}} \leq \|[A^*, A]\|$  and the function  $F$  is nondecreasing and concave, from the above estimates it follows that

$$\begin{aligned} \|K'_\varepsilon\| &\leq F(\|[A^*, A]\| + 2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})) + \frac{\varepsilon}{3} \\ &\leq F(\|[A^*, A]\|) + F(2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})) + \frac{\varepsilon}{3} \end{aligned}$$

and, consequently,

$$\|A - 3T'_\varepsilon\| \leq \|R\| + 3\|K'_\varepsilon\| \leq 5F(\|[A^*, A]\|) + 3F(2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})) + \varepsilon.$$

Thus we can take  $T_\varepsilon := 3T'_\varepsilon$ . □

*Remark 3.9.* Since  $\varepsilon$  can be chosen arbitrarily small, the distance from an operator  $A$  satisfying the conditions of Theorem 3.8 to the set of diagonal operators does not exceed  $5F(\|[A^*, A]\|) + 3F\left(2F(\|[A^*, A]\|_{\text{ess}})\right)$ . If  $A$  is normal then this sum is equal to zero and Theorem 3.8 turns into the Weyl–von Neumann–Berg theorem for bounded operators.

#### 3.4. Truncations of normal operators

Let  $G$  be a positive unbounded self-adjoint operator in a separable Hilbert space  $H$  whose spectrum consists of eigenvalues of finite multiplicity accumulating to  $\infty$ . Denote its spectral projections corresponding to the intervals  $(0, \lambda)$  by  $P_\lambda$ , and let

$$N(\lambda) := \text{rank } P_\lambda \quad \text{and} \quad N_1(\lambda) := \sup_{\mu \leq \lambda} (N(\mu) - N(\mu - 1)).$$

If  $B \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  and  $[G, B] \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  then, according to [13, Theorem 1.3],

$$\begin{aligned} & \|(I - P_\lambda)BP_\lambda\|_2^2 \\ & \leq \|(I - P_\lambda)B(P_\lambda - P_{\lambda-1})\|_2^2 + \|(I - P_\lambda)[G, B](G - \lambda I)^{-1}P_{\lambda-1}\|_2^2. \end{aligned} \quad (3.6)$$

A direct calculation shows that  $\|(G - \lambda I)^{-1}P_{\lambda-1}\|_2^2 \leq \frac{\pi^2}{6} N_1(\lambda)$  (see [13] for details). This estimate, (3.6) and the obvious inequality  $\|P_\lambda - P_{\lambda-1}\|_2^2 \leq N_1(\lambda)$  imply that

$$\|(I - P_\lambda)BP_\lambda\|_2^2 \leq \left( \|B\|^2 + \frac{\pi^2}{6} \|[G, B]\|^2 \right) N_1(\lambda). \quad (3.7)$$

Let  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  be a normal operator such that  $[G, A] \in \mathcal{B}(H)$ , and let  $A_\lambda := P_\lambda A P_\lambda$  be its truncation to the subspace  $P_\lambda H$ . Then

$$[A_\lambda^*, A_\lambda] = P_\lambda A^* (I - P_\lambda) A P_\lambda - P_\lambda A (I - P_\lambda) A^* P_\lambda$$

and, consequently,

$$\|[A_\lambda^*, A_\lambda]\|_1 \leq \|P_\lambda A^* (I - P_\lambda) A P_\lambda\|_1 + \|P_\lambda A (I - P_\lambda) A^* P_\lambda\|_1.$$

Since  $\|P_\lambda B^* (I - P_\lambda) B P_\lambda\|_1 = \text{Tr}(P_\lambda B^* (I - P_\lambda) B P_\lambda) = \|(I - P_\lambda) B P_\lambda\|_2^2$ , applying (3.7) with  $B = A$  and  $B = A^*$ , we obtain

$$\|[A_\lambda^*, A_\lambda]\|_1 \leq C_A N_1(\lambda), \quad (3.8)$$

where  $C_A := 2\|A\|^2 + \frac{\pi^2}{3} \|[G, A]\|^2$ . The inequalities (3.2) and (3.8) imply that

$$\inf_{T_\lambda} \|A_\lambda - T_\lambda\|_1 \leq N(\lambda) F(C_A N_1(\lambda)/N(\lambda)), \quad (3.9)$$

where the infimum is taken over all normal operators  $T_\lambda$  acting in the finite dimensional subspace  $P_\lambda H$ .

Assume that there exist positive constants  $c$  and  $\varkappa$  such that  $N(\lambda) = c\lambda^\varkappa + o(\lambda^\varkappa)$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow \infty$  (that is, we have a Weyl type asymptotic formula for the counting function  $N(\lambda)$ ). Then  $N_1(\lambda)/N(\lambda) \rightarrow 0$  and, consequently,  $F(C_A N_1(\lambda)/N(\lambda)) \rightarrow 0$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow \infty$ . Therefore, in view of (3.9), there exist normal operators  $\tilde{T}_\lambda$  acting in the subspaces  $P_\lambda H$  such that  $\|\lambda^{-\varkappa} A_\lambda - \tilde{T}_\lambda\|_1 \rightarrow 0$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow \infty$ . Roughly speaking, this means that, under the above conditions on  $A$  and  $N(\lambda)$ , the normalized truncations  $\lambda^{-\varkappa} A_\lambda$  are asymptotically close to normal matrices with respect to the  $\mathcal{S}_1$ -norm.

*Remark 3.10.* The Weyl asymptotic formula holds for elliptic self-adjoint pseudodifferential operators on closed compact manifolds and differential operators on domains with appropriate boundary conditions. If  $G$  is a pseudodifferential operator of order 1 and  $A$  is the multiplication by a smooth function, as in the Szegő limit theorem [14], then  $A$  and  $[G, A]$  are bounded in the corresponding space  $L_2$  and we have (3.9).

*Remark 3.11.* In [13], the classical Szegő limit theorem was extended to wide classes of self-adjoint (pseudo)differential operators  $G$  and  $A$ . More precisely, the authors proved that  $\text{Tr } f(A_\lambda) \sim \text{Tr } P_\lambda f(A) P_\lambda$  as  $\lambda \rightarrow \infty$  for all sufficiently smooth functions  $f : \mathbb{R} \mapsto \mathbb{R}$  and all self-adjoint operators  $G$  and  $A$  satisfying the above conditions. If  $f : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  and the operator  $A$  is normal then the right hand side of the above asymptotic formula is well-defined. However, generally speaking, the truncations  $A_\lambda$  are not normal matrices and the left hand side does not make sense. The results of this subsection suggest that similar limit theorems can be obtained for (almost) normal operators  $A$ , provided that  $\text{Tr } f(A_\lambda)$  is understood in an appropriate sense. For instance, it is plausible that the asymptotic formula holds for all sufficiently smooth functions  $f : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  if one defines  $\text{Tr } f(A_\lambda) := \sum_j f(\mu_j)$ , where  $\mu_j$  are the eigenvalues of  $A_\lambda$  (see [15]).

#### 4. Resolution of the identity

The proof of Theorem 2.1 is based on successive reductions of the operator  $A \in L_n$  to normal operators whose spectra do not contain certain subsets of the complex plane. One can think of this process as removing subsets from  $\sigma(A)$ . After each step we obtain a new normal operator lying in  $L_n$ . The main problem is that, in order to carry on the reduction procedure, one has to ensure that the removal of a subset  $\Omega$  from the spectrum does not change the spectral projection corresponding to  $\mathbb{C} \setminus \overline{\Omega}$ , and that the new operator still satisfies the condition **(C)**. In our scheme this is guaranteed by the equality  $A(I - \Pi_\Omega) = A_\Omega(I - \Pi_\Omega)$  and the condition **(a<sub>4</sub>)**.

Further on

- $\mathcal{D}_r(\lambda)$  is the open disc of radius  $r$  centred at  $\lambda \in \mathbb{C}$ , and  $\partial\mathcal{D}_r(\lambda)$  is its boundary;
- $\mathbb{S} := \partial\mathcal{D}_1(0)$  is the unit circle about the origin.

We shall need the following lemmas which will be proved in the next two subsections.

**Lemma 4.1.** *Let  $A \in L_n$ , and let  $\Pi_\Omega$  be the spectral projection of  $A$  corresponding to an open set  $\Omega \subset \mathbb{C}$ . If  $\Omega$  is homeomorphic to the disc  $\mathcal{D}_1(0)$  and  $A - \mu I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$  for some  $\mu \in \Omega$  then there exists a normal operator  $R_\Omega$  in the subspace  $\Pi_\Omega H$  such that*

- (a<sub>1</sub>)  $(A - R_\Omega)\Pi_\Omega \in L$  and, consequently,  $A_\Omega := A(I - \Pi_\Omega) \oplus R_\Omega \in L_n$ ;
- (a<sub>2</sub>)  $\sigma(R_\Omega) \subset \partial\Omega$ , so that  $\sigma(A_\Omega) \subset (\sigma(A) \setminus \Omega) \cup \partial\Omega$ ;
- (a<sub>3</sub>)  $A_\Omega - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1}$  for all  $\lambda \in \Omega$ ;
- (a<sub>4</sub>) if  $A$  satisfies the condition (C) then so does the operator  $A_\Omega$ .

In other words, we can remove the set  $\Omega$  from  $\sigma(A)$  by adding a perturbation which does not change  $A(I - \Pi_\Omega)$ . Moreover,

$$(a_5) \quad \|A - A_\Omega\| = \|(A - R_\Omega)\Pi_\Omega\| \leq 2r,$$

where  $r$  is the radius of the minimal disc containing  $\Omega$ . This shows that the perturbation is small whenever  $\Omega$  is a subset of a small disc. However, the new operator  $A_\Omega$  may have additional spectrum lying on  $\partial\Omega$ .

In view of the above, Lemma 4.1 is not sufficient for the study of operators with one dimensional spectra, as does not allow one to split the one dimensional spectrum into disjoint components. This problem is resolved by

**Lemma 4.2.** *Let the conditions of Lemma 4.1 be fulfilled. Assume, in addition, that*

- (i)  $L$  has real rank zero;
- (ii)  $\sigma(A) \cap \Omega$  is a subset of a simple contour  $\gamma$  which intersects  $\partial\Omega$  at two points;
- (iii)  $A - \mu I \in L_0^{-1}$  for all  $\mu \in \Omega \setminus \gamma$ .

Then there exists a normal operator  $R_\Omega : \Pi_\Omega H \mapsto \Pi_\Omega H$  satisfying the conditions (a<sub>1</sub>), (a<sub>3</sub>), (a<sub>4</sub>) and

$$(a'_2) \quad \sigma(R_\Omega) \subset \gamma \cap \partial\Omega, \text{ so that } \sigma(A_\Omega) \subset (\sigma(A) \setminus \Omega) \cup (\gamma \cap \partial\Omega)$$

#### 4.1. Proof of Lemma 4.1

The proof proceeds in three steps.

4.1.1.

Assume first that  $\Omega = \mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)$  and  $\mu = 0$ , that is,  $A \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$ . For the sake of brevity, we shall denote  $\Pi_\varepsilon := \Pi_{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$ ,  $R_\varepsilon := R_{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$  and  $A_\varepsilon := A_{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$ .

Let  $A = V|A|$  be the polar decomposition of  $A$ . Let us consider a sequence of operators  $B_n \in L_0^{-1}$  such that  $B_n \rightarrow A$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ , and let  $B_n = V_n|B_n|$  be their polar decompositions. Then  $|B_n| \rightarrow |A|$  and  $V_n|A| \rightarrow V|A|$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . Since  $V_n|B_n| = |B_n^*|V_n$  and  $|B_n^*| \rightarrow |A^*| = |A|$ , we also have  $|A|V_n \rightarrow |A|V$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . It follows that  $V_n\rho(|A|) \rightarrow V\rho(|A|)$  and  $\rho(|A|)V_n \rightarrow \rho(|A|)V$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$  for every continuous function  $\rho : \mathbb{R}_+ \mapsto \mathbb{R}$  vanishing near the origin.

Let us fix arbitrary continuous nonnegative functions  $\rho_1$  and  $\rho_2$  of  $\mathbb{R}_+$  such that  $\rho_1 \equiv 1$  and  $\rho_2 \equiv 0$  on the interval  $[\varepsilon, \infty)$ ,  $\rho_1 \equiv 0$  near the origin, and  $\rho_1^2 + \rho_2^2 \equiv 1$ . Let

$$S_n := V\rho_1^2(|A|) + \rho_2(|A|)V_n\rho_2(|A|).$$

The operators  $S_n$  belong to  $L$  because  $V_n \in L$  (see Remark 1.1),  $\rho(|A|) \in L$  for all continuous functions  $\rho$ , and  $V\rho_1(|A|) = A\tilde{\rho}_1(|A|)$  where  $\tilde{\rho}_1(\tau) := \tau^{-1}\rho_1(\tau)$  is a continuous function.

Since  $V$  commutes with  $|A|$ , we have

$$\begin{aligned} S_n - V_n &= (V - V_n)\rho_1^2(|A|) \\ &\quad - (V - V_n)(I - \rho_2(|A|))\rho_2(|A|) - (I - \rho_2(|A|))(V_n - V)\rho_2(|A|). \end{aligned}$$

By the above, the norm of the right hand side converges to zero as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ . Since  $V_n \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$  (see Lemma 1.7), this implies that  $S_n \in L_0^{-1}$  for all sufficiently large  $n$ .

Let us fix  $n$  such that  $S_n \in L_0^{-1}$  and consider the polar decomposition  $S_n = U_n|S_n|$ . By Lemma 1.7,  $U_n \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$ . Since  $S_n(I - \Pi_\varepsilon) = V(I - \Pi_\varepsilon)$ , the operator  $S_n$  coincides with the orthogonal sum  $V(I - \Pi_\varepsilon) \oplus S_n\Pi_\varepsilon$ . The unitary operator  $U_n$  has the same block structure,  $U_n = V(I - \Pi_\varepsilon) \oplus U_n\Pi_\varepsilon$ .

Let  $R_\varepsilon$  be the restriction of  $\varepsilon U_n$  to the subspace  $\Pi_\varepsilon H$ . Obviously,  $\sigma(R_\varepsilon)$  is a subset of  $\partial\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)$ . Since  $(A - R_\varepsilon)\Pi_\varepsilon = A - f_\varepsilon(|A|)U_n$  where  $f_\varepsilon(t) := \varepsilon + (t - \varepsilon)_+$ , the operator  $R_\varepsilon$  satisfies the condition (a<sub>1</sub>).

We have  $A_\varepsilon = A(I - \Pi_\varepsilon) \oplus R_\varepsilon = f_\varepsilon(|A|)U_n$ , where  $f_\varepsilon \geq \varepsilon > 0$  and  $U_n \in L_0^{-1}$ . Therefore  $A_\varepsilon \in L_0^{-1}$  (see Lemma 1.7). Since  $\sigma(A_\varepsilon) \cap \mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0) = \emptyset$ , Lemma 1.5 implies that  $A_\varepsilon - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$  for all  $\lambda \in \overline{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$ .

It remains to prove that  $A_\varepsilon - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$  for  $\lambda \notin \overline{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$  whenever  $A$  satisfies the condition (C). Let  $\Pi_{\delta,\lambda}$  be the spectral projection of  $A$  corresponding to the open disc  $\mathcal{D}_\delta(\lambda)$  of radius  $\delta < |\lambda| - \varepsilon$ . Applying the above arguments to the operator  $A - \lambda I$ , we can find an operator  $R_{\delta,\lambda}$  acting in  $\Pi_{\delta,\lambda}H$  such that  $\sigma(R_{\delta,\lambda}) \subset \partial\mathcal{D}_\delta(\lambda)$ ,  $(A - R_{\delta,\lambda})\Pi_{\delta,\lambda} \in L$  and

$$A - (A - R_{\delta,\lambda})\Pi_{\delta,\lambda} - \lambda I = A(I - \Pi_{\delta,\lambda}) \oplus R_{\delta,\lambda} - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1}. \quad (4.1)$$

Denote

$$B_{t,\delta} := ((1-t)A + tA_\varepsilon)(I - \Pi_{\delta,\lambda}) \oplus R_{\delta,\lambda}.$$

Since  $\Pi_\varepsilon \Pi_{\delta,\lambda} = \Pi_{\delta,\lambda} \Pi_\varepsilon = 0$  and  $A_\varepsilon = A - (A - R_\varepsilon) \Pi_\varepsilon$ , we have

$$B_{t,\delta} = A(I - \Pi_{\delta,\lambda}) \oplus R_{\delta,\lambda} - t(A - R_\varepsilon) \Pi_\varepsilon = B_\delta^{(1)} \oplus B_t^{(2)} \oplus R_{\delta,\lambda}, \quad (4.2)$$

where  $B_\delta^{(1)} := A(I - \Pi_{\delta,\lambda})(I - \Pi_\varepsilon)$  and  $B_t^{(2)} := ((1-t)A + tR_\varepsilon) \Pi_\varepsilon$ . Obviously,  $\sigma(B_\delta^{(1)}) \subset \mathbb{C} \setminus \mathcal{D}_\delta(\lambda)$  and  $\sigma(B_t^{(2)}) \subset \overline{\mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)}$  for all  $t \in [0, 1]$  (because  $\|B_{t,\delta}^{(2)}\| \leq \varepsilon$ ). Thus the spectra of all the operators in the orthogonal sum on the right hand side of (4.2) do not contain the point  $\lambda$ . Therefore the operator  $B_{t,\delta} - \lambda I$  is invertible. The first equality (4.2) implies that  $B_{t,\delta} \in L$ , so we have  $B_{t,\delta} - \lambda I \in L^{-1}$  for all  $t \in [0, 1]$ . By (4.1),  $B_{0,\delta} - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1}$  and, consequently,  $B_{1,\delta} - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1}$ . Now, letting  $\delta \rightarrow 0$ , we obtain

$$\lim_{\delta \rightarrow 0} (B_{1,\delta} - \lambda I) = \lim_{\delta \rightarrow 0} (A_\varepsilon(I - \Pi_{\delta,\lambda}) \oplus R_{\delta,\lambda} - \lambda I) = A_\varepsilon - \lambda I \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}.$$

#### 4.1.2.

Let  $B \in L_n$ , and let  $\varphi : \mathbb{C} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$  be a homeomorphism isotopic to the identity. The results obtained in Subsection 4.1.1 imply that  $\varphi(B)$  satisfies the condition **(C)** whenever so does the operator  $B$ .

Indeed, let us fix  $\mu \in \mathbb{C}$  and consider the isomorphism  $\psi : z \mapsto \varphi(z + \varphi^{-1}(\mu))$ . Denote  $A := B - \varphi^{-1}(\mu)I$ , and let  $A_\varepsilon$  be the operators constructed in Subsection 4.1.1. We have  $\mu \notin \sigma(\psi(A_\varepsilon))$  for all  $\varepsilon > 0$  because  $\psi^{-1}(\mu) = 0 \notin \sigma(A_\varepsilon)$ . Moreover, since  $\varphi$  is isotopic to the identity, the same is true for  $\psi$  and, by Lemma 1.5,  $\psi(A_\varepsilon) - \mu I \in L_0^{-1}$  for all  $\varepsilon > 0$ . This implies that

$$\varphi(B) - \mu I = \psi(A) - \mu I = \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} (\psi(A_\varepsilon) - \mu I) \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}.$$

#### 4.1.3.

Assume now that  $\Omega$  is an arbitrary domain and  $\mu \in \Omega$  is an arbitrary point satisfying the conditions of the lemma. Let us fix a homeomorphism  $\psi : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  isotopic to the identity such that  $\psi : \Omega \mapsto \mathcal{D}_1(0)$  and  $\psi(\mu) = 0$ . Denote  $\tilde{A} := \psi(A)$ . Then  $\Pi_\Omega$  coincides with the spectral projection of  $\tilde{A}$  corresponding to the open disc  $\mathcal{D}_1(0)$ .

By 4.1.1, there exists an operator  $\tilde{R}_1$  acting in the subspace  $\Pi_\Omega H$  such that  $(\tilde{A} - \tilde{R}_1) \Pi_\Omega \in L$  and  $\sigma(\tilde{R}_1) \subset \partial \mathcal{D}_1(0)$ . Let  $\tilde{A}_1 := \tilde{A}(I - \Pi_\Omega) \oplus \tilde{R}_1$  and  $R_\Omega := \psi^{-1}(\tilde{R}_1)$ . Obviously, the inverse image  $R_\Omega$  satisfies (a<sub>1</sub>) and (a<sub>2</sub>), and  $A_\Omega = \psi^{-1}(\tilde{A}_1)$ . Since  $\psi$  is isotopic to the identity, Lemma 1.5 implies (a<sub>3</sub>). Finally, by 4.1.2, if  $A$  satisfies the condition **(C)** then the same is true for the operators  $\tilde{A}$ ,  $\tilde{A}_1$  (as was shown in 4.1.1) and  $A_\Omega$ .  $\square$

#### 4.2. Proof of Lemma 4.2

It is sufficient to prove the lemma in the case where  $\Omega = \mathcal{D}_1(0)$  and  $\gamma \cap \Omega = (-1, 1)$ . After that, the general result is obtained by choosing a homeomorphism  $\psi$  isotopic to the identity such that  $\psi : \Omega \mapsto \mathcal{D}_1(0)$  and  $\psi : \gamma \cap \Omega \mapsto (-1, 1)$  and repeating the same arguments as in 4.1.3.

Further on we always assume that  $\Omega$ ,  $\gamma$  and  $\sigma(A)$  are as above and write  $\Pi_1$ ,  $R_1$  and  $A_1$  instead of  $\Pi_\Omega$ ,  $R_\Omega$  and  $A_\Omega$ .

##### 4.2.1.

Suppose first that  $\sigma(A)$  lies on a simple closed contour  $\gamma'$  homeomorphic to  $\mathbb{S}$ .

Let  $\varphi : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  be a homeomorphism isotopic to the identity such that  $\varphi : \gamma' \mapsto \mathbb{S}$  and  $\varphi(0) = -1$ . The operator  $\varphi(A)$  belongs to  $L_u$  because its spectrum lies in  $\mathbb{S}$ . The condition (iii) and Lemma 1.5 imply that  $\varphi(A) \in L_0^{-1}$ . Therefore, by Lemma 1.8, there exist operators  $W_n \in L_u$  such that  $W_n \rightarrow \varphi(A)$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$  and  $-1 \notin \sigma(W_n)$ . Let  $B_n := \varphi^{-1}(W_n)$  be their inverse images. Then  $B_n$  belong to  $L_n$ ,  $\sigma(B_n) \subset \gamma' \setminus \{0\}$  for all  $n$ , and  $B_n \rightarrow A$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$ .

The rest of this subsection is similar to Subsection 4.1.1. Let us fix continuous nonnegative functions  $\rho_1$  and  $\rho_2$  of  $\mathbb{R}_+$  such that  $\rho_1 \equiv 1$  and  $\rho_2 \equiv 0$  on the interval  $[1, \infty)$ ,  $\rho_1 \equiv 0$  near the origin, and  $\rho_1^2 + \rho_2^2 \equiv 1$ . Define

$$\tilde{S}_n := V\rho_1^2(|A|) + \rho_2(|A|)(\operatorname{Re} V_n)\rho_2(|A|)$$

where  $V$  and  $V_n$  are the isometric operators in the polar representations  $A = V|A|$  and  $B_n = V_n|B_n|$ . Note that

$$\rho_2(|B_n|)(\operatorname{Re} V_n)\rho_2(|B_n|) = (\operatorname{Re} V_n)\rho_2^2(|B_n|) = V_n\rho_2^2(|B_n|) \quad (4.3)$$

because  $\sigma(B_n) \cap \mathcal{D}_1(0) \subset (-1, 1)$  and  $\rho_2 \equiv 0$  outside the interval  $[0, 1)$ .

We have

$$\tilde{S}_n - V_n = (V - V_n)\rho_1^2(|A|) + (\rho_2(|A|)(\operatorname{Re} V_n)\rho_2(|A|) - V_n\rho_2^2(|A|)).$$

Since  $\rho_1 \equiv 0$  in a neighbourhood of the origin, the first term in the right hand side converges to zero. Since  $\rho_2(|B_n|) \rightarrow \rho_2(|A|)$ , the identity (4.3) implies that the second term also converges to zero. Thus  $\|\tilde{S}_n - V_n\| \rightarrow 0$  as  $n \rightarrow \infty$  and, consequently,  $\tilde{S}_n \in L^{-1}$  for all sufficiently large  $n$ .

Let us fix  $n$  such that  $\tilde{S}_n \in L^{-1}$  and consider the polar decomposition  $\tilde{S}_n = \tilde{U}_n|\tilde{S}_n|$ . The unitary operator  $\tilde{U}_n$  has the same block structure as  $U_n$  in the proof of Lemma 4.1 but now, in addition, its restrictions to the subspace  $\Pi_1 H$  is self-adjoint. Let  $R_1 = \tilde{U}_n|_{\Pi_1 H}$ . Then  $R_1$  satisfies (a<sub>1</sub>) and its spectrum can contain only the points  $\pm 1$ , so we have (a'<sub>2</sub>) instead of (a<sub>2</sub>). By Remark 1.6,  $A_1$  satisfies the condition **(C)**, which implies (a<sub>3</sub>) and (a<sub>4</sub>).

4.2.2.

Suppose now that  $\sigma(A) \setminus (-1, 1)$  is an arbitrary subset of  $\mathbb{C} \setminus \mathcal{D}_1(0)$ .

In the process of proof we shall introduce auxiliary operators  $A^{(1)}$  and  $A^{(2)}$  lying in  $L_n$ , such that

- ( $\star$ ) the spectral projection of  $A^{(j)}$  corresponding to  $\mathcal{D}_1(0)$  coincides with  $\Pi_1$ , and  $A^{(j)} \Pi_1 = A \Pi_1$ .

Every next operator will have a simpler spectrum, and  $R_1$  will be defined in terms of  $A^{(2)}$ .

Let us consider the homotopy  $\psi_t : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  defined by

$$\psi_t(z) = \begin{cases} z & \text{if } z \in \mathcal{D}_1(0), \\ (1-t)z + t \frac{z}{|z|} & \text{if } z \notin \mathcal{D}_1(0), \end{cases} \quad \text{where } t \in [0, 1],$$

and let  $A^{(1)} := \psi_1(A)$ . Since  $\psi_1 : \mathbb{C} \setminus \mathcal{D}_1(0) \mapsto \mathbb{S}$  and  $\psi_1(z) = z$  for all  $z \in \mathcal{D}_1(0)$ , the operator  $A^{(1)}$  satisfies the condition ( $\star$ ) and  $\sigma(A^{(1)}) \subset (-1, 1) \cup \mathbb{S}$ . In view of Lemma 1.5,  $A^{(1)}$  also satisfies (iii). Denote by  $\tilde{\Pi}$  the spectral projection of  $A^{(1)}$  corresponding to the open lower semicircle  $\mathbb{S}_- := \{z \in \mathbb{S} : \text{Im } z < 0\}$ .

Now let us consider the homotopy  $\varphi_t : \overline{\mathcal{D}_1(0)} \mapsto \overline{\mathcal{D}_1(0)}$  defined by

$$\varphi_t = \begin{cases} z - it \text{Im } z + it \sqrt{1 - (\text{Re } z)^2} & \text{if } \text{Im } z \geq 0, \\ z + it \sqrt{1 - (\text{Re } z)^2} & \text{if } \text{Im } z \leq 0, \end{cases} \quad \text{where } t \in [0, 1],$$

and let  $\tilde{A} := \varphi_1(A^{(1)})$ . Since  $\varphi_1 : \mathbb{S}_- \mapsto (-1, 1)$ ,  $\varphi_1 : (-1, 1) \mapsto \mathbb{S}_+$  and  $\varphi_1 : \mathbb{S}_+ \mapsto \mathbb{S}_+$ , the spectrum  $\sigma(\tilde{A})$  lies on the contour  $\gamma'$  formed by the interval  $[-1, 1]$  and the upper semicircle  $\mathbb{S}_+ := \{z \in \mathbb{S} : \text{Im } z > 0\}$ . By Lemma 1.5, the operator  $\tilde{A}$  satisfies (iii).

Note that  $\varphi_1|_{\mathbb{S}_-}$  is a homeomorphism between  $\mathbb{S}_-$  and  $(-1, 1)$ . Therefore, the spectral projection of  $\tilde{A}$  corresponding to the interval  $(-1, 1)$  coincides with  $\tilde{\Pi}$ . Applying 4.2.1 to the operator  $\tilde{A}$ , we can find a self-adjoint operator  $\tilde{R}$  acting in the subspace  $\tilde{\Pi}H$  such that  $(\tilde{A} - \tilde{R})\tilde{\Pi} \in L$ ,  $\sigma(\tilde{R}) \subset \{-1, 1\}$  and  $\tilde{A}(I - \tilde{\Pi}) \oplus \tilde{R}$  satisfies the condition (iii). Since the restriction of  $\tilde{A}$  to  $\tilde{\Pi}H$  is self-adjoint, we have  $(\tilde{A} - \tilde{R})\tilde{\Pi} \in L_s$ .

Let  $A^{(2)} := A^{(1)} - \tilde{\varphi}_1^{-1}((\tilde{A} - \tilde{R})\tilde{\Pi})$ , where  $\tilde{\varphi}_1^{-1} : (-1, 1) \mapsto \mathbb{S}_-$  is the inverse mapping  $(\varphi_1|_{\mathbb{S}_-})^{-1}$ . Then we have  $A^{(2)} = A^{(1)}(I - \tilde{\Pi}) \oplus \tilde{R}$ . This implies that  $\sigma(A^{(2)}) \subset \gamma'$  and  $A^{(2)}$  satisfies the condition ( $\star$ ). Moreover,  $A^{(2)}$  satisfies (iii) because

$$[0, 1] \ni t \mapsto A^{(1)} - t\tilde{\varphi}_1^{-1}((\tilde{A} - \tilde{R})\tilde{\Pi}) - \mu I$$

is a path in  $L^{-1}$  from  $A^{(1)} - \mu I$  to  $A^{(2)} - \mu I$  for each  $\mu$  lying in the open domain bounded by  $\gamma'$ .

Finally, applying 4.2.1 to  $A^{(2)}$ , we obtain an operator  $R_1$  in the subspace  $\Pi_1 H$  such that  $(A^{(2)} - R_1)\Pi_1 = (A - R_1)\Pi_1 \in L_s$  and  $\sigma(R_1) \subset \{-1, 1\}$ .

The latter inclusion and (ii) imply that  $\sigma((A - tA + tR_1)\Pi_1) \subset [-1, 1]$  for all  $t \in [0, 1]$ . Thus we have

$$A - t(A - R_1)\Pi_1 - \mu I \in L^{-1}, \quad \forall \mu \in \mathcal{D}_1(0) \setminus (-1, 1), \quad \forall t \in [0, 1].$$

Since the operator  $A$  satisfies (iii), it follows that  $A_1 - \mu I \in L_0^{-1}$  for all  $\mu \in \mathcal{D}_1(0)$ , where  $A_1 = A(I - \Pi_1) \oplus R_1$ . Now (a<sub>3</sub>) and (a<sub>4</sub>) are proved in the same way as in Lemma 4.1.  $\square$

### 4.3. Proof of Theorem 2.1

Every open set  $\Omega_j$  coincides with the union of a collection of open discs. Since the spectrum  $\sigma(A)$  is compact, it is sufficient to prove the theorem assuming that  $\Omega_j$  is the union of a finite collection of open disks  $D_{j,k}$ . If there exist mutually orthogonal projections  $P_{j,k}$  such that  $\sum_{j,k} P_{j,k} = I$  and  $P_{j,k}H \subset \Pi_{D_{j,k}}H$  then we can take  $P_j := \sum_k P_{j,k}$ . Thus we only need to prove the theorem for open discs  $\Omega_j$ . In the rest of the proof we shall be assuming that  $\Omega_j = \mathcal{D}_{r_j}(z_j)$ .

The proof is by induction on  $m$ . If  $m = 1$  then the result is obvious. Suppose that the theorem holds for  $m - 1$  and consider a family of  $m$  open discs  $\{\Omega_j\}_{j=1}^m$  covering  $\sigma(A)$ . If  $\Omega_k \subset \bigcup_{j \neq k} \Omega_j$  for some  $k$  then we can take  $P_k = 0$  and apply the induction assumption. Further on we shall be assuming that  $\Omega_k \not\subset \bigcup_{j \neq k} \Omega_j$  for all  $k = 1, \dots, m$ .

#### 4.3.1.

If  $r > t > 0$ , let

$$\mathcal{D}_r := \mathcal{D}_r(z_m) \quad \text{and} \quad \mathcal{D}_{t,r} := \{z \in \mathbb{C} : t < |z - z_m| < r\}.$$

Note that

$$\sigma(A) \setminus \mathcal{D}_t \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j \tag{4.4}$$

whenever  $r_m - t$  is small enough. Indeed, if this were not true then there would exist a sequence of points  $\mu_n \in \sigma(A) \setminus \left(\bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j\right)$  converging to  $\partial\Omega_m$ , and the limit point would not belong to  $\bigcup_{j=1}^m \Omega_j$ .

In the rest of the proof  $t \in (0, r_m)$  is assumed to be so close to  $r_m$  that (4.4) holds.

#### 4.3.2.

In this subsection we are going to construct auxiliary operators  $A^{(i)} \in L_n$  satisfying (C) and the following condition

- ( $\star\star$ )  $\Pi_{\Omega_j}^{(i)}H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_j}H$  for all  $j = 1, \dots, m$ , where  $\Pi_{\Omega_j}^{(i)}$  are the spectral projections of  $A^{(i)}$  corresponding to  $\Omega_j$ .

Assume first that  $\partial\Omega_m \cap \Omega_{j_k} \neq \emptyset$  for some indices  $j_k \leq m-1$ . Let us fix an arbitrary  $r \in (t, r_m)$  and consider the open annulus  $\mathcal{D}_{t,r}$ . The circles  $\partial\Omega_{j_k}$  split  $\mathcal{D}_{t,r}$  into a finite collection of connected disjoint open sets  $\Lambda_\alpha$  such that  $\overline{\mathcal{D}_{t,r}} = \bigcup_\alpha \overline{\Lambda_\alpha}$ . Each set  $\Lambda_\alpha$  is a circular polygon whose edges are arcs of the circles  $\partial\Omega_{j_k}$ ,  $\partial\mathcal{D}_t$  and  $\partial\mathcal{D}_r$ . Since  $\Omega_k \not\subset \mathcal{D}_{t,r}$  for all  $k = 1, \dots, m$ , the boundaries  $\partial\Lambda_\alpha$  are connected and, consequently, each polygon  $\Lambda_\alpha$  is homeomorphic to a disc.

Let us remove from  $\sigma(A)$  the open sets  $\Lambda_\alpha$ , repeatedly applying Lemma 4.1. Then we obtain an operator  $A^{(1)} \in L_n$  satisfying the condition **(C)**, such that

$$\sigma(A^{(1)}) \subset \overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup (\bigcup_\alpha \partial\Lambda_\alpha) \cup (\mathbb{C} \setminus \mathcal{D}_r) \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma(A^{(1)}) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r} = \sigma(A) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r}.$$

Note that  $\Lambda_\alpha \subset \Omega_j$  whenever  $\partial\Lambda_\alpha \cap \Omega_j \neq \emptyset$ . In view of (a<sub>2</sub>), this implies that the removal of  $\Lambda_\alpha$  from the spectrum can only reduce the eigenspace corresponding to  $\Omega_j$ . Therefore  $A^{(1)}$  satisfies the condition **(\*\*)**.

Now, repeatedly applying Lemma 4.2, let us remove from  $\sigma(A^{(1)}) \cap \mathcal{D}_{t,r}$  the interiors of all edges of the polygons  $\partial\Lambda_\alpha$  lying in the open annulus  $\mathcal{D}_{t,r}$ . Then we obtain an operator  $A^{(2)} \in L_n$  satisfying the condition **(C)**, such that

$$\sigma(A^{(2)}) \subset \overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup \Sigma \cup \partial\mathcal{D}_r \cup (\sigma(A) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r}) \quad \text{and} \quad \sigma(A^{(2)}) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r} = \sigma(A) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r}, \quad (4.5)$$

where  $\Sigma$  is the set of vertices of the polygons  $\Lambda_\alpha$ . If at least one point of a closed edge of  $\Lambda_\alpha$  belongs to  $\Omega_j$ , then the interior part of this edge also lies in  $\Omega_j$ . In view of (a'<sub>2</sub>), this implies that the removal of open arcs does not increase the eigenspaces corresponding to  $\Omega_j$ . Therefore  $A^{(2)}$  satisfies **(\*\*)**.

By (4.5), the set of  $z \in \sigma(A^{(2)}) \setminus \mathcal{D}_r$  which do not belong to  $\sigma(A) \setminus \mathcal{D}_r$  consists of a countable collection of arcs  $\gamma_\beta$  of the circle  $\partial\mathcal{D}_r$ , whose end points belong either to  $\Sigma \cap \partial\mathcal{D}_r$  or to  $\sigma(A) \cap \partial\mathcal{D}_r$ . Each interior point of  $\gamma_\beta$  is separated from  $\sigma(A^{(2)}) \setminus \overline{\mathcal{D}_r}$  (otherwise it would belong to  $\sigma(A)$ ). The set  $\Sigma$  is finite and, by (4.4), the intersection  $\sigma(A) \cap \partial\mathcal{D}_r$  is a subset of  $\bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j$ . This implies that  $(\sigma(A^{(2)}) \cap \partial\mathcal{D}_r) \setminus \left( \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j \right)$  is covered by a finite subcollection of arcs  $\gamma_{\beta'}$  whose end points belong to  $\Sigma \cup \left( \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j \right)$ . Repeatedly applying Lemma 4.2, let us remove the interior parts of the arcs  $\gamma_{\beta'}$  from  $\sigma(A^{(2)})$ . Then we obtain an operator  $A^{(3)} \in L_n$  satisfying the condition **(C)**, such that

$$\sigma(A^{(3)}) \subset \overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup \Sigma \cup \left( \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j \setminus \mathcal{D}_r \right). \quad (4.6)$$

For the same reason as before,  $A^{(3)}$  also satisfies the condition **(\*\*)**.

If  $\partial\Omega_m \cap \Omega_j = \emptyset$  for all  $j = 1, \dots, m-1$  then  $\sigma(A)$  is separated from the boundary  $\partial\Omega_m$ , and we define  $A^{(3)} = A$ . Obviously, in this case  $A^{(3)}$  also satisfies **(\*\*)** and (4.6) with  $\Sigma = \emptyset$  and some  $t \in (0, r_m)$  and  $r \in (t, r_m)$ .

### 4.3.3.

Let  $P_m$  be the spectral projection of the operator  $A^{(3)}$  corresponding to the set  $\overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup \Sigma$ . Since  $t < r$  and  $\Sigma$  is finite, this set is separated from  $\sigma(A^{(3)}) \setminus \mathcal{D}_r$  and, consequently,  $P_m \in L$ . Since  $\overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup \Sigma \subset \Omega_m$ , the condition  $(\star\star)$  implies that  $P_m H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_m} H$ .

Given  $z \in \mathbb{C}$ , let us consider the operator

$$A_z := zP_m + (I - P_m)A^{(3)}.$$

From (4.6) it follows that

$$\sigma(A_z) \subset \{z\} \cup \left( \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j \setminus \mathcal{D}_r \right), \quad \forall z \in \mathbb{C}. \quad (4.7)$$

If  $z \in \mathcal{D}_t$  then for each sufficiently small  $\delta > 0$  there is a homeomorphism  $\varphi_{z,\delta} : \mathbb{C} \mapsto \mathbb{C}$  isotopic to the identity, which maps a neighbourhood of  $\overline{\mathcal{D}_t} \cup \Sigma$  onto  $\mathcal{D}_\delta(z)$  and coincides with the identity on a neighbourhood of  $\sigma(A^{(3)}) \setminus \mathcal{D}_r$ . By 4.1.2, all the operators  $\varphi_{z,\delta}(A^{(3)})$  satisfy the condition **(C)**. Since  $\varphi_{z,\delta}(A^{(3)})$  converge to  $A_z$  as  $\delta \rightarrow 0$ , this implies that  $A_z$  also satisfy the condition **(C)** for all  $z \in \mathcal{D}_t$ .

If  $z \notin \mathcal{D}_t$  and  $\lambda \neq z$ , let us fix a point  $\tilde{z} \in \mathcal{D}_t$  and a path  $\mu(s)$  from  $\tilde{z}$  to  $z$  which does not go through  $\lambda$ . Assume that  $\varepsilon > 0$  is so small that  $\tilde{z} \notin \mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(\lambda)$ . Then, applying Lemma 4.1 with  $\Omega = \mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(\lambda)$  to  $A_{\tilde{z}}$ , we can find an operator  $A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} := A_{\tilde{z},\Omega} \in L_n$  such that  $P_m A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} = A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} P_m = \tilde{z} P_m$ ,  $A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1}$  and  $\lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} = A_{\tilde{z}}$ . Since  $\mu(s)P_m + A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon}(I - P_m) - \lambda I$  is a path in  $L^{-1}$  from  $A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon} - \lambda I$  to  $zP_m + A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon}(I - P_m) - \lambda I$ , the latter operator also belongs to  $L_0^{-1}$ . Therefore

$$A_z - \lambda I = \lim_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} (zP_m + A_{\tilde{z},\varepsilon}(I - P_m) - \lambda I) \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}, \quad \forall \lambda \neq z.$$

Obviously, the same inclusion holds for  $\lambda = z$ . Thus the operators  $A_z$  satisfy the condition **(C)** for all  $z \in \mathbb{C}$ .

### 4.3.4.

Let us fix an arbitrary point  $z' \in \Omega_1 \setminus \left( \bigcup_{j=2}^m \Omega_j \right)$  and denote  $A' := A_{z'}$ . In view of (4.7), we have  $\sigma(A') \subset \bigcup_{j=1}^{m-1} \Omega_j$ . Applying the induction assumption to the operator  $A'$ , we can find mutually orthogonal projections  $P'_1, P'_2, \dots, P'_{m-1}$  such that  $P'_1 + \sum_{j=2}^{m-1} P'_j = I$ ,  $P'_1 H \subset \Pi'_{\Omega_1} H$  and  $P'_j H \subset \Pi'_{\Omega_j} H$  for all  $j = 2, \dots, m-1$ , where  $\Pi'_{\Omega_j}$  are the spectral projections of  $A'$  corresponding to  $\Omega_j$ . Since  $z' \notin \bigcup_{j=2}^{m-1} \Omega_j$ , the projections  $\Pi'_{\Omega_2}, \dots, \Pi'_{\Omega_{m-1}}$  coincide with the spectral projections of the truncation  $A^{(3)}|_{(I-P_m)H}$ . Thus we have  $P_m \Pi'_{\Omega_j} = 0$  for all  $j = 2, \dots, m-1$  and, consequently,  $P_m H \subset P'_1 H$ .

Let  $P_1 := P'_1 - P_m$ . Then, by the above,  $P_1, \dots, P_m$  are mutually orthogonal projections such that  $\sum_{j=1}^m P_j = I$ . It remains to notice that, in view of  $(\star\star)$ ,

$$(P'_1 - P_m) H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_1}^{(3)} H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_1} H$$

and  $\Pi'_{\Omega_j} H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_j}^{(3)} H \subset \Pi_{\Omega_j} H$  for all  $j = 2, \dots, m-1$ . □

## 5. Remarks and references

### 5.1.

One can easily show that  $L_f \cap L_s \subset \overline{L^{-1} \cap L_s}$  and  $L_f \cap L_n \subset \overline{L_0^{-1} \cap L_n}$  in any  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  (see the proof of Corollaries 2.4 and 2.5). If  $L$  has real rank zero then

- (1)  $L_s = \overline{L_f \cap L_s}$  (this is the implication (1)  $\Rightarrow$  (3) in Corollary 2.4) and
- (2)  $L_0^{-1} \cap L_u = \overline{L_f \cap L_u}$ .

The first result is well known and elementary (see, for example, [16, Theorem V.7.3] or [6, Theorem 2.6]). The second is due to Huaxin Lin [17]. Note that (2) is an immediate consequence of (1) and Lemma 1.8.

Theorem 2.1 and Lemma 2.3 imply the following “quantitative” versions of (1) and (2).

*If  $L$  has real rank zero then*

- (1') *for every  $A \in L_s$  there exist self-adjoint operators  $A_1, A_2, \dots \in L$  such that  $\|A - A_n\| \leq \frac{\sqrt{2}}{n}$  and  $\sigma(A_n)$  contains at most  $2n\|A\| + 1$  points.*
- (2') *for every  $A \in L_0^{-1} \cap L_u$  there exist unitary operators  $A_1, A_2, \dots \in L$  such that  $\|A - A_n\| \leq \frac{\sqrt{2}}{n}$  and  $\sigma(A_n)$  contains at most  $2\pi n + 1$  points.*

Indeed, in both cases  $A$  is a normal operator satisfying the condition **(C)** and  $\sigma(A)$  has an open cover  $\{\Omega_j\}_{j=1}^m$  of multiplicity 2 by open discs  $\Omega_j$  of diameter  $\frac{1}{n}$ , where  $m = 2n\|A\| + 1$  in the first case and  $m = 2\pi n + 1$  in the second case.

### 5.2.

Let  $L$  be an arbitrary unital  $C^*$ -algebra. If an operator  $A \in L$  satisfies the condition **(C)** then

$$\mathbf{(C_0)} \quad A - \lambda I \in L_0^{-1} \text{ for all } \lambda \notin \sigma(A).$$

If the complement  $\mathbb{C} \setminus \sigma(A)$  is dense in  $\mathbb{C}$  then **(C<sub>0</sub>)** implies **(C)**, but in the general case it is not true.

One says that a  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  has weak (FN) if every normal operator satisfying **(C<sub>0</sub>)** can be approximated by normal operators with finite spectra. In view of Corollary 2.5, a  $C^*$ -algebra of real rank zero has weak (FN) if and only if the conditions **(C)** and **(C<sub>0</sub>)** are equivalent for all normal operators.

In [18] and [19], Huaxin Lin has described some classes of simple real rank zero  $C^*$ -algebras with weak (FN). The following modification of the example from [18] shows that the simplicity condition is important for the weak (FN) property.

Let  $\mathcal{L}$  be an unital  $C^*$ -algebra such that  $\mathcal{L}_n \not\subset \overline{\mathcal{L}_0^{-1}}$ . Consider the direct sum  $L = \mathcal{L} \oplus \mathcal{L}$ , and let  $A = A_1 \oplus A_2$  where  $A_1, A_2$  are normal elements of  $\mathcal{L}$  such

that  $A_1 \notin \overline{\mathcal{L}_0^{-1}}$ ,  $\|A_1\| \leq 1$  and  $\sigma(A_2) = \{z \in \mathbb{C} : |z| \leq 1\}$ . Then  $A \in L_n$  and  $\sigma(A)$  coincides with the unit disc about the origin. In view of Remark 1.6,  $A$  satisfies  $(\mathbf{C}_0)$ . However,  $A \notin \overline{L_0^{-1}} = \overline{\mathcal{L}_0^{-1}} \oplus \overline{\mathcal{L}_0^{-1}}$ .

5.3.

Theorem 2.1 remains valid for self-adjoint operators  $A$  in a general  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  satisfying the condition

$(\mathbf{C}_s)$   $A - \lambda I \in \overline{L^{-1} \cap L_s}$  for all  $\lambda \in \mathbb{R}$ .

Indeed, if we take  $B_n \in L^{-1} \cap L_s$  in Subsection 4.1.1 then the operators  $V_n$ ,  $S_n$  and  $U_n$  are self-adjoint, and so is the operator  $A_\varepsilon$ . The same arguments show that  $A_\varepsilon$  still satisfies the condition  $(\mathbf{C}_s)$ . Therefore, iterating this procedure, we can remove from  $\sigma(A)$  an arbitrary finite collection of open intervals without changing the spectral projections corresponding to the complements of their closures. This allows us to construct approximate spectral projections in the same manner as in Subsection 4.3, with obvious simplifications due to the fact that  $\sigma(A) \subset \mathbb{R}$ .

Using this observation, one can refine Corollary 2.4 as follows.

5.4.

*In an arbitrary  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$ , the following statements about a self-adjoint operator  $A \in L_s$  are equivalent.*

- (1) *The operator  $A$  satisfies the condition  $(\mathbf{C}_s)$ .*
- (2) *The operator  $A$  has approximate spectral projections in the sense of Theorem 2.1, associated with any finite open cover of its spectrum.*
- (3)  $A \in \overline{L_f \cap L_s}$ .

As explained in Subsection 5.3, (2) follows from (1), and the other two implications are proved in the same way as in Subsection 2.1.

5.5.

It is clear from the proof that Lemma 4.1 remains valid if we replace  $L_0^{-1}$  with  $L^{-1}$ . However, in Lemma 4.2 the assumption (iii) is of crucial importance.

5.6.

For a disc  $\Omega = \mathcal{D}_\varepsilon(0)$ , Lemma 4.1 without the condition  $(a_4)$  can easily be deduced from [20, Theorem 5] (see also [8, Theorem 2.2]). In the both papers the theorem was proved for  $A \in \overline{L^{-1}}$ , but in [5, Section 3] the authors explained that the approximating operator belongs  $\overline{L_0^{-1}}$  whenever  $A \in \overline{L_0^{-1}}$ .

[20, Theorem 5] holds for a general operator  $A$  satisfying the condition  $\text{dist}(A, L^{-1}) < \varepsilon$ , whereas we assumed that  $\text{dist}(A, L_0^{-1}) = 0$  and, in addition, that  $A$  is normal. Our proof slightly differs from those in [20], [8] and [5]. It gives a weaker result in the general case but is better suited for the study of operators with one dimensional spectra. It also shows that one can choose approximating operators satisfying the condition  $(\mathbf{C})$ .

5.7.

Lemma 4.2 seems to be new. Possibly, one could deduce the  $(1) \Rightarrow (3)$  part of Corollary 2.5 from [18, Theorem 5.4], but our approach gives more information about the approximating operators. In particular, Theorem 2.1 implies a quantitative (in the same sense as in Subsection 5.1) version of [18, Theorem 5.4].

5.8.

One can further refine Theorem 2.12 by introducing subsets  $M_T^n \subset M_T$ , which consist of convex combinations of operators of the form  $S_1 T S_2$  containing at most  $n$  terms. The same proof shows that  $M_{[A^*, A]}$  in (2.5) can be replaced with  $M_{[A^*, A]}^{n(\varepsilon)}$  where  $n(\varepsilon)$  is an integer-valued nonincreasing function of  $\varepsilon \in (0, \infty)$ .

5.9.

A review of results on almost commuting operators and matrices can be found in [21]. The authors listed several dimension-dependent results and discussed the following known example by D. Voiculescu [23].

Let  $\{e_0, e_1, \dots, e_m\}$  be an orthonormal basis in  $\mathbb{C}^{m+1}$ , and let  $A_m$  and  $B_m$  be  $(m+1) \times (m+1)$ -matrices defined by the identities

$$\begin{aligned} A_m e_j &= \left(1 - \frac{2j}{m}\right) e_j \text{ for all } j = 0, \dots, m, \\ B_m e_j &= \frac{2}{m+1} \sqrt{(j+1)(m-j)} e_{j+1} \text{ for all } j = 0, \dots, m-1, \\ B_m e_m &= 0. \end{aligned}$$

Then  $\|A_m\| = 1$ ,  $\|B_m\| \leq 1$ ,  $A_m = A_m^*$ ,  $\|[B_m^*, B_m]\| \leq \frac{4}{m}$  and  $\|[A_m, B_m]\| \leq \frac{2}{m}$ , so that the Hermitian matrices  $A_m$ ,  $\operatorname{Re} B_m$  and  $\operatorname{Im} B_m$  are almost commuting for large values of  $m$ . However, the distance between the pair  $\{A_m, B_m\}$  and any pair of commuting  $(m+1) \times (m+1)$ -matrices is estimated from below by a constant independent of  $m$  (see [22]).

This example shows that, without additional assumptions,  $B(\varepsilon)$  in (2.5) cannot be replaced by  $B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s$  (or, in other words, it is not sufficient to adjust only one operator in a pair of almost commuting self-adjoint operators to obtain a pair of commuting self-adjoint operators). Indeed, if (2.5) held with  $B(\varepsilon) \cap L_s$  then, applying Theorem 2.12 to the matrices  $\operatorname{Re} B_m + iA_m$  and  $\operatorname{Im} B_m + iA_m$ , we could find Hermitian  $(m+1) \times (m+1)$ -matrices  $X_m$  and  $Y_m$  such that  $[A_m, X_m] = [A_m, Y_m] = 0$  and  $\|X_m + iY_m - B_m\| \rightarrow 0$  as  $m \rightarrow \infty$ .

5.10.

Theorem 2.12 allows one to obtain approximation results for bounded operators with compact self-commutators. For instance, if  $A \in \mathcal{B}(H)$  satisfies the condition **(C)**,  $\|A\| \leq 1$ ,  $[A^*, A] \in \mathcal{S}_p$  and  $\|[A^*, A]\|_p \leq c$  then the number of eigenvalues of each operator from  $h(\varepsilon)M_{[A^*, A]}$  lying outside the interval  $(-\varepsilon, \varepsilon)$  does not exceed  $(c\varepsilon^{-1}h(\varepsilon))^p$ . In view of (2.5), this implies that for each  $\varepsilon > 0$

there exist a normal operator  $T_\varepsilon$  and a self-adjoint operator  $R_\varepsilon$  of finite rank such that  $\|A - T_\varepsilon - R_\varepsilon\| \leq 2\varepsilon$  and  $\text{rank } R_\varepsilon \leq (c\varepsilon^{-1}h(\varepsilon))^p$ . Moreover, if the operator  $A$  is compact then one can take  $T_\varepsilon \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ .

Since Theorem 2.12 does not give an explicit estimate for  $h(\varepsilon)$ , the above observation is of limited interest. However, it shows that  $\text{rank } R_\varepsilon$  is bounded by a constant depending only on  $\varepsilon$  and  $p$ .

5.11.

If  $A \in B(H)$  and  $\varepsilon > 0$ , let us define

$$\text{Spec}_\varepsilon(A) := \sigma(A) \bigcup \{z \in \mathbb{C} : \|(A - zI)^{-1}\| > \varepsilon^{-1}\}.$$

The set  $\text{Spec}_\varepsilon(A)$  is called the  $\varepsilon$ -pseudospectrum of  $A$ . It is known that

$$\text{Spec}_\varepsilon(A) = \bigcup_{\|R\| < \varepsilon} \sigma(A + R) \quad \text{and} \quad \bigcap_{\delta > \varepsilon} \text{Spec}_\delta(A) = \overline{\text{Spec}_\varepsilon(A)}$$

(see, for instance, [24, Theorem 9.2.13]) and [25, Lemma 2]). Let

$$d_A(\varepsilon) := \sup_{\lambda \in \text{Spec}_\varepsilon(A)} \text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)) \quad \text{and} \quad d_A(0) := \sup_{\lambda \in \sigma(A)} \text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)),$$

where  $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)$  is the spectrum of the corresponding element of the Calkin algebra.

In [26] the authors proved the following statement. If  $\|[A^*, A]\| \leq c^2$  and

$$\|(A - \lambda I)^{-1}\| \leq (\text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)) - c)^{-1}, \quad \forall \lambda : \text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)) > c,$$

then the normal operator  $T$  in the BDF theorem can be chosen in such a way that  $\sigma(T) = \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)$  and  $\|A - T\| \leq f(c)$ , where  $f : [0, \infty) \rightarrow [0, \infty)$  is some (unknown) continuous function vanishing at the origin that depends only on  $\sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)$ .

Note that, under the above condition on  $(A - \lambda I)^{-1}$ , we have  $d_A(\varepsilon) \leq c + \varepsilon$  for all  $\varepsilon > 0$ . Theorem 3.8(1) implies the following more precise result which holds without any a priori assumptions about the resolvent.

5.12.

*Under the conditions of the BDF theorem, there exists a normal operator  $T$  such that  $\sigma(T) = \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)$ ,  $A - T \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and*

$$\|A - T\| \leq 2\|A\| F(\|A\|^{-2}\|[A^*, A]\|) + d_A(2\|A\| F(\|A\|^{-2}\|[A^*, A]\|)),$$

where  $F : [0, \infty) \mapsto [0, 1]$  is a nondecreasing concave function vanishing at the origin, which does not depend on  $A$ .

Indeed, applying Theorem 3.8(1) to the operator  $\|A\|^{-1}A$ , we can find a normal operator  $T'$  such that  $A - T' \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and

$$\|A - T'\| \leq 2\|A\| F(\|A\|^{-2}\|[A^*, A]\|).$$

By the above,  $\sigma(T') \subset \text{Spec}_\delta(A)$  for all  $\delta > \|A - T'\|$  and, consequently,

$$\text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(T')) = \text{dist}(\lambda, \sigma_{\text{ess}}(A)) \leq d_A(\|A - T'\|), \quad \forall \lambda \in \sigma(T').$$

Now, using the spectral theorem, one can easily construct a normal operator  $T$  such that  $T - T' \in \mathcal{C}(H)$ ,  $\sigma(T) = \sigma_{\text{ess}}(T')$  and  $\|T - T'\| \leq d_A(\|A - T'\|)$ . This operator satisfies the required conditions.

### 5.13.

Theorem 2.12 states that (2.5) holds for all  $C^*$ -algebras  $L$  of real rank zero with some universal function  $h$ . The function  $F$  is determined only by  $h$  and, therefore, (2.11) is true for all  $C^*$ -algebras  $L$  of real rank zero and all seminorms satisfying the conditions (2.10). Our proof is by contradiction and does not give explicit estimates for  $h$  and  $F$ .

For a particular  $C^*$ -algebra  $L$  and a seminorm  $\|\cdot\|_*$  on  $L$ , it may be possible to optimize the choice of functions  $h$  and  $F$  or to obtain additional information about their behaviour. Note that

- (i) if (2.5) holds with some function  $h$  then we also have (2.11) with  $F$  defined by (2.9) for all seminorms  $\|\cdot\|_*$  satisfying (2.10);
- (ii)  $\liminf_{\varepsilon \rightarrow 0} (\varepsilon h(\varepsilon)) > 0$  for any function  $h$  satisfying (2.5) and
- (iii)  $\liminf_{t \rightarrow 0} (t^{-1/2} F(t)) > 0$  for any function  $F$  satisfying (2.11)

(otherwise we obtain a contradiction by substituting an operator  $\delta A$  and letting  $\delta \rightarrow 0$ ).

### 5.14.

In [21] the authors conjectured that the estimate (3.1) holds with a function  $F$  such that  $F(t) \sim t^{1/2}$  as  $t \rightarrow 0$ . In the recent paper [27], Hastings announced (3.1) with  $F(t) = t^{1/5} \tilde{F}(t)$ , where  $\tilde{F}$  is a function growing slower than any power of  $t$  as  $t \rightarrow 0$ .

Note that the proof of Theorem 3.8(1) uses only (3.1). Therefore, if Hastings' result is correct, we obtain the following corollary.

### 5.15.

*Let  $A$  satisfy the conditions of the BDF theorem, and let  $\|A\| \leq 1$ . Then for each  $\varepsilon, \delta > 0$  there exists a diagonal operator  $T_{\varepsilon, \delta}$  such that  $A - T_{\varepsilon, \delta} \in \mathcal{C}(H)$  and*

$$\|A - T_{\varepsilon, \delta}\| \leq C_\delta \| [A^*, A] \|^{1/5 - \delta} + \varepsilon,$$

where  $C_\delta$  is a constant depending only on  $\delta$ .

### 5.16.

The estimate (3.2) with a function  $F$  depending on  $p$  follows from [28, Theorem 4.2]. In [29] the authors have shown that for  $p = 2$  one can take  $F(t) = ct^{-1/4}$  in (3.2), where  $c$  is some constant independent of the dimension.

5.17.

In most statements, for the sake of simplicity, we assumed that  $\|A\| \leq 1$ . One can easily get rid of this condition by applying the corresponding result to the operator  $\|A\|^{-1}A$  (as was done in Subsection 5.12).

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