Orch-OR with Recurrence:

A Minimal Dynamical Condition for When Objective Reductions Yield Conscious Experience

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.17942531

ORCID: 0009-0002-0143-5949
Date: 15.12.2025

Status: Technical note for scientific discussion

Reference:

Speed, T. (2025). MNO and Ontological Recurrence: A Non-Representational Account of Quantum Measurement and Conscious Experience (Version 1). Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17913823

Abstract

The Orch-OR framework identifies conscious moments with objective reductions (OR) of quantum superpositions in microtubules. Even if its physical assumptions were fully confirmed, a central question remains unresolved: why should an OR event yield phenomenal experience rather than merely selecting a physical state. This paper proposes a minimal dynamical condition that completes Orch-OR without modifying its collapse mechanism. The core claim is that OR is necessary but not sufficient for consciousness. Conscious experience arises only when OR events are embedded in a bounded recurrent dynamic between actuality and an ontological possibility-space. Formally, non-conscious OR corresponds to direct state updates, whereas conscious OR requires post-reduction re-access to a set of possible successor states prior to stabilization. This recurrence condition is non-representational, non-cognitive, and physically implementable as a metastability window in microtubular dynamics. The framework explains why not all collapse events are conscious, why biological systems can host phenomenality while non-biological systems cannot, and why conscious states vary systematically across anesthesia, wakefulness, psychedelic states, and meditative clarity. The proposal yields concrete, testable predictions for neurophysiology, quantum biology, and computational simulations, including recurrence-dependent signatures in coherence dynamics and precision modulation. Recurrence does not replace Orch-OR; it supplies the minimal dynamical threshold under which objective reductions yield conscious experience.

1 — Background

The Orch-OR framework (Penrose–Hameroff) proposes that moments of conscious experience correspond to objective reductions (OR) of quantum superpositions in microtubules. Orch-OR is powerful because it specifies a *physical* mechanism of non-computable state reduction. Yet the framework retains a conceptual gap that critics repeatedly target:

Why should an OR event feel like anything at all, rather than merely selecting a physical state?

Put sharply: OR can occur in many physical contexts, but phenomenality does not appear everywhere. Therefore OR alone cannot be the discriminator between "collapse events that are merely physical" and "collapse events that are lived".

What is missing is a *minimal dynamical condition* that:

- does not change Orch-OR's physics,
- is testable, and
- explains why brains can host conscious OR while non-biological systems do not.

This note proposes such a condition.

2 — Proposal

2.1 Core claim

OR is necessary but not sufficient.
An OR event yields conscious experience only if it is embedded in a recurrent dynamic between actuality and an ontological possibility-space.

In the simplest form:

- OR without recurrence → non-conscious
- OR with recurrence → conscious

The point is not to add "mind" as a separate ingredient, but to specify a dynamical threshold that Orch-OR itself needs in order to answer its own "why does OR feel like experience?" question.

2.2 Minimal formalisation

Let:

- A_t= actual microstate immediately after an OR event
- $P(A_t)$= the set of ontologically possible successor microstates accessible prior to stabilisation (this is *not* a cognitive model; it is the real successor-possibility structure available before the system locks into a fixed trajectory)

Two update modes:

(i) Non-conscious OR (direct update):

$$A_{t+1} = f(A_t)$$

(ii) Conscious OR (recurrence-modulated update):

$$A_{t+1} = f(A_t, P(A_t))$$

with the additional recurrence condition: the system re-enters / re-accesses a possibility-rich regime before stabilisation, in a bounded window.

2.3 Recurrence is not "more OR"

A common confusion (and a common weak point in discussions) is to mistake recurrence for "many OR events". That's not the claim.

Recurrence ≠ repeated OR.
Recurrence = a post-reduction return to possibility prior to stabilisation; a metastable loop in which the next actualisation becomes dependent on the structure of the possible successors, not only on the last actual state.

2.4 Threshold window

To avoid panpsychism and "everything feels", recurrence must be bounded. The formal condition can be written as a window:

- recurrence magnitude $R(A_t)$must exceed a minimum: $R(A_t) > R_{\min}$
- stabilisation remains bounded: $D(A_t) < D_{\max}$

Intuitively: enough opening to possibility and enough closure to retain identity.

3 — Interpretation in Terms of Microtubular Dynamics

The recurrence condition proposed here can be realised within the biological microtubular architecture already assumed by Orch-OR, without modifying its physical postulates.

3.1 Microtubules as recurrence-capable structures

Microtubules exhibit a set of empirically relevant properties that make recurrence plausible:

- ordered lattice geometry supporting coherent dipole states
- intra-lattice conduction pathways enabling rapid state transitions
- metastable coherence regimes compatible with room-temperature quantum effects
- known anesthetic binding sites affecting coherence and phase relations

Within this architecture, quantum superpositions evolve toward objective reduction (OR) as specified by Orch-OR. The recurrence proposal concerns **what happens immediately after OR**, before full stabilisation.

3.2 Post-OR return to possibility

In standard Orch-OR, an OR event yields a definite microstate. The recurrence condition adds a minimal dynamical refinement:

After OR, the microtubular state does not immediately stabilise, but transiently re-enters a **possibility-rich regime** in which multiple successor microstates remain accessible.

Formally:

- OR occurs (non-computable reduction)
- the post-OR state A_t temporarily accesses $P(A_t)$
- stabilisation occurs only after this recurrence window closes

This post-OR recurrence is not representational, inferential, or cognitive. It is a **physical metastability window** in which the system's next update depends on the structure of its own quantum-possible futures.

3.3 Mapping recurrence to neurophysiological states

The recurrence hypothesis yields a **predictive mapping** between known neurobiological conditions and phenomenology:

State	**Predicted recurrence profile**	**Phenomenology**
Deep sleep / anesthesia	Recurrence suppressed (R ≈ 0)	No experience
Normal wakefulness	Bounded recurrence	Ordinary consciousness
Psychedelics	Excessive opening, weak stabilisation	Altered / unstable experience
Meditative clarity	Increased recurrence with strong stabilisation	Heightened clarity
Coma	Near-zero recurrence	No experience

This mapping aligns with:

- anesthetic disruption of microtubular coherence
- gamma-band modulation and metastability in wakefulness
- psychedelic destabilisation without collapse of biological function

Crucially, **OR still occurs** in all these states. What changes is the **recurrence regime**, not the collapse mechanism.

4 — What the Recurrence Condition Contributes to Orch-OR

The recurrence condition does **not** replace Orch-OR. It completes it by supplying the missing discriminative principle.

Specifically, it explains:

4.1 Why not every collapse yields experience

OR events occur widely in physical systems. Without recurrence, these events remain **phenomenally empty**. Recurrence specifies **which OR events are lived** and which are not, without invoking additional ontological substances.

4.2 Why OR is necessary but not sufficient

- OR provides non-computable selection.
- Recurrence provides access to the space of possibilities from which selection occurs.

Only their conjunction yields phenomenality. This resolves the long-standing "why does OR feel like something?" objection without weakening Orch-OR's physical core.

4.3 Why biological systems can experience, crystals cannot

Crystals, detectors, and non-living systems may undergo OR-like events, but they lack:

- bounded metastable recurrence,
- post-reduction access to possibility,
- cyclic reopening before stabilisation.

Brains, by contrast, possess architectures that naturally implement recurrence. Consciousness therefore appears **structurally**, not magically, and not universally.

4.4 Why conscious states vary predictably

Because recurrence has **parameters** (magnitude, duration, boundedness), changes in neuromodulation, anesthesia, or pharmacology lead to **systematic changes in experience**, not arbitrary ones.

This accounts for:

- loss of consciousness under anesthesia,
- graded transitions into sleep or waking,
- psychedelic expansion without total collapse,
- meditative increases in clarity rather than chaos.

In short: Orch-OR supplies the collapse. Recurrence supplies the condition under which collapse becomes experience.

5 — Empirical Predictions

The recurrence condition does not introduce speculative metaphysics. It yields **concrete, discriminable predictions** that can be tested using existing methods in neuroscience, quantum biology, and computational modelling.

5.1 Recurrence frequency as a correlate of conscious level

The model predicts that **level and clarity of consciousness correlate with recurrence parameters**, not with the mere presence of OR events.

Specifically:

- conscious level ∝ recurrence frequency and boundedness
- unconscious states correspond to suppression of post-OR recurrence
- altered states correspond to imbalance between opening and stabilisation

This predicts **graded**, not binary, transitions between conscious states.

5.2 Neurophysiological signatures

At the neural level, recurrence should manifest as **oscillatory alternation between coherence and destabilisation**, rather than sustained coherence or random noise.

Predicted signatures:

- structured oscillatory patterns (e.g. gamma-band modulation with metastable resets)
- non-Markovian temporal dependencies in state transitions
- phase-reset or hysteresis-like windows preceding stabilisation

Importantly, the prediction is **not** "consciousness = oscillation", but:

consciousness corresponds to *bounded recurrence*, distinguishable from both static order and unstructured fluctuation.

5.3 Anesthesia

Under general anesthesia:

- OR events continue to occur
- microtubular and neural activity persists
- **post-OR return to possibility is suppressed**

Thus:

- collapse without recurrence → no experience

This explains the **sudden and global** loss of consciousness under anesthesia better than models relying on gradual loss of activity or information integration.

5.4 Psychedelics

Psychedelic states correspond to:

- increased opening to possibility
- weakened or delayed stabilisation
- excessive recurrence amplitude

Predicted consequences:

- expanded experiential content
- reduced phenomenological stability
- altered sense of self and time

This matches known findings on increased neural entropy and reduced hierarchical constraint, but grounds them in a **specific dynamical condition** rather than a descriptive metaphor.

5.5 Meditation and lucid states

Meditative clarity and lucid dreaming are predicted to involve:

- increased recurrence frequency
- **strong stabilisation preserved**
- high recurrence *within bounds*

This yields:

- heightened clarity rather than disorganisation
- sustained identity despite expanded access to possibility

The model therefore distinguishes meditative states from psychedelic ones structurally, not morally or culturally.

5.6 Testability

All predictions are testable using:

- EEG / MEG phase-reset and metastability analysis
- anesthetic binding and coherence studies
- computational microtubule simulations

- recurrence-sensitive measures of non-Markovianity

No new instrumentation or exotic physics is required.

6 — Summary

Component	**Classical Orch-OR**	**Orch-OR with Recurrence**
What collapses	quantum superposition	identical
Mechanism of collapse	objective reduction (OR)	identical
Why collapse feels like experience	unspecified	recurrence condition
Which OR events are conscious	unclear	formally discriminated
Role of biology	implicit	structurally specified
Panpsychism risk	unresolved	excluded by threshold
Empirical predictions	indirect	direct and testable

Key conclusion:

Recurrence does not replace Orch-OR.
It supplies the **minimal dynamical condition** under which objective reductions yield conscious experience.

Collapse is necessary.
Recurrence makes it conscious.