

Memristors and Nonequilibrium Stochastic Multistable Systems

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Abstract

The main aim of this special issue is to report the recent advances and new trends in memristors and nonequilibrium stochastic multistable systems, both theoretically and experimentally, within an interdisciplinary context. In particular, memristors are multistable systems whose switching dynamics is a stochastic process, which can be controlled by internal and external noise sources, unveiling their constructive role. Furthermore, the application of memristors as memory elements in neuromorphic systems with noise-assisted persistence of memory states, chaotic dynamics, metastable chaos and chaos synchronization, new stochastic nonlinear models, noise-induced phenomena such as stochastic resonance, noise enhanced stability and phase transitions phenomena in memristors will be illustrated in the contributions of this special issue.

Keywords: resistive switching, memristor, metastability, noise-enhanced stabilization, constructive role of noise, neuromorphic systems, multistability, chaos, synchronization

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1. Introduction

Memristors are multistable systems whose switching dynamics occurs under the action of noise or a deterministic signal [1]. To use the memristors as memory elements in resistive random access memory (RRAM) and neuromorphic systems, it is necessary to significantly extend the understanding of the resistive state switching process taking into account multistability, the role of internal and external noise sources and metastable states in the transient nonlinear dynamics of such nonequilibrium systems. More generally, the presence of internal and external noise sources gives rise to interesting counterintuitive phenomena both in classical and quantum physical systems and in different models of interdisciplinary physics [2]-[13]. The internal structure of memristors and their dynamical behavior are a typical example of complex multistable systems, characterized by complex dynamic behavior, for which the theoretical techniques of nonequilibrium statistical mechanics must be applied. Moreover, the nonlinear relaxation process in multistable systems is crucial for understanding the switching mechanism in memristive nanomaterials. This special issue is devoted to considering extended versions of papers presented at the conference “New Trends in Nonequilibrium Stochastic Multistable Systems and Memristors (NES2019)”, held in the Ettore Majorana Centre in Erice (Trapani, Sicily, Italy) from 18 to 21 October 2019, as well as external submissions. We have selected the best contributions, after providing a careful examination of the submissions, a desk-rejection of the papers outside the scope of the Focus Issue, and a meticulous peer-review with the help of Referees.

The aim of the meeting NES2019 was to bring together scientists interested in the challenging problems connected with the dynamics of nonequilibrium multistable systems and memristor devices from both theoretical and experimental points of view, within an interdisciplinary context. The NES2019 international event has been a discussion forum to promote new ideas in this fertile research field, and in particular to identify new trends and key technology areas such as memristors nanomaterials and technologies, development of memristors as

building blocks for quantum and neuromorphic computing, new stochastic non-linear models, phase transitions phenomena in filamentary switching in resistive random-access memory, control of memory lifetime and memcomputing.

2. Neuromorphic systems and chaotic memristive neural networks

The NES2019 international event brought together scientists, theorists and experimentalists interested in the challenging problems associated with the switching dynamics of memristor devices and its technological applications. In this respect, neuromorphic (bio-inspired) computing based on memristive devices may offer dramatic performance improvements in solving computationally hard problems. Indeed, memristive devices, although the diffusion, stability, and switching mechanisms are not yet fully understood, remain excellent promising candidates for neuromorphic computing [14]. Among the many interesting contributions to this special issue in the research area of neuromorphic systems [15]-[32], we mention the paper [33], where the constructive role of an external noise signal, in the form of a low-rate Poisson sequence of pulses supplied to all inputs of a single-layer spiking neural network consisting of simple integrate-and-fire neurons and memristive synaptic weights, has been investigated. In particular this positive role of an external signal consists in maintaining for a long time or even recovering a memory trace of the image without its direct rewriting. In fact, the synaptic weights can be to a certain extent unreliable, due to such characteristics as the limited retention time of the resistive state or the variation of switching voltages. Nevertheless, the noise in the form of the low-rate pattern-free train of pulses can have a constructive role in the dynamical maintenance or even fine-tuning of a memory trace stored in a memristive single-layer spiking neuromorphic networks. Such a *noise-assisted persistence of memory*, on one hand, could be a prototypical mechanism in a biological nervous system and, on the other hand, brings one step closer to the possibility of building reliable spiking neural networks composed of unreliable analog elements [33].

Furthermore, concerning contributions on chaotic memristive neural net-

works, metastable chaos, chaos synchronization, memristor hyperchaotic system [34]-[46], we cite the paper dealing with metastable and intermittent chaos [47]. In this article, a computational model of a memristive artificial neuron taking into consideration inertia of metallic nanoparticles within the dielectric layer of the core-memristor is proposed. In particular, the underdamped mechanical motion of an Ag-cluster in a gap between two arms of a conducting bridge driven by both an electric field and a temperature gradient inside a single well potential has been considered. This model, which could successfully emulate living biological neurons by neuromorphic devices, displays rich nonlinear dynamics. In fact, dynamical regimes appear in the system with variation of inertness of the Ag-nanoparticles and transitions between them. For high inertia, interesting metastable and intermittent chaos can appear in the system.

3. Resistive switching dynamics, role of noise sources and stochastic memristor models

Recently fabricated diffusive memristors have attracted a significant interest as one of the best candidates to mimic neuron activities and to implement novel computing paradigms. Such devices are capable of exhibiting a very rich dynamics consisting of a combination of chaotic and stochastic phenomena necessary for efficient neuromorphic computational systems. However, understanding of stochastic resistive switching dynamics, reset transition, dynamics of multilevel structures, phase transition phenomena and role of external and thermal noise sources in memristors is still an open problem, as we can see in the following contributions of the special issue [48]-[64]. The resistive switching (RS) effect, from a high resistance state to a low resistance state, is a bistable (or multistable) switching of resistance of a thin nanometric dielectric film sandwiched between two conductive electrodes subjected to an external voltage. The wide application of memristors is limited by insufficient stability, high variability of the resistive switching parameters during the operation, lack of understanding of drift-diffusion processes and their degradation. One of the fundamental origins

of the instability of the memristor's parameters is the essentially stochastic nature of the RS process. New approaches to improve switching properties in various nonlinear multistable stochastic systems using a beneficial role of noise have recently been thoroughly investigated, as shown in the contributions [65, 67] to this special issue. Indeed, Gaussian (thermal) and non-Gaussian noise sources play a relevant role in multistable systems, as shown in the contributions [68]-[72]. Furthermore stochastic models of diffusion equations and in particular for memristor systems have been proposed in this issue [67, 66]. An archetypal model is that of an overdamped Brownian motion in multistable potential profiles [6, 67]. The beneficial or constructive role of noise usually manifests itself in a nonmonotonic dependence of the switching parameters (such as switching time, relaxation time, mean amplitude of average switching amplitude, output signal-to-noise ratio, etc.) on the noise intensity or temperature [73, 74, 75]. In other words, in nonlinear systems, the effect of noise can induce new, more ordered regimes that lead to regular structures, an increasing degree of coherence, and cause new phase transitions. Noise-induced phenomena showing the constructive role of noise in the RS process, typical of nonlinear stochastic systems, have been experimentally observed in memristors. These are the stochastic resonance (SR) [73], the stochastic resonant activation and the noise enhanced stability (NES) [74, 75]. It is worthwhile to note that the first experimental evidence of SR and NES in memristor systems has been reported in three papers of this special issue [73, 74, 75]. In particular, It was found that the memristor relaxation time depends on the temperature in a non-monotonous way with a maximum observed at the temperature close to 55 °C. This nonmonotonic behavior is a signature of the noise-enhanced stability phenomenon observed in all physical (classical and quantum), biological, chemical and ecological systems with metastable states. The stability of a metastable state can be enhanced by the noise and its average lifetime is a measure of this stability. This noise-enhanced metastability is a consequence of the interplay between the random fluctuations and nonlinearity of the complex system investigated, and it has been observed experimentally in the presence of internal (thermal) [74] and ex-

ternal [75] noise sources. These findings pave the way for a deeper understanding of the switching mechanism in memristor systems and at the same time for a wide range of applications where noise is used as a control parameter.

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Declaration of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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