

# The Truth about diffusion (in liquids)

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# Diffusion in Liquids

- There is a common belief that diffusion in all sorts of materials, including gases, liquids and solids, is described by random walks and **Fick's law** for the **concentration** of labeled (tracer) particles  $c(\mathbf{r}, t)$ ,

$$\partial_t c = \nabla \cdot [\chi(\mathbf{r}) \nabla c],$$

where  $\chi \succeq \mathbf{0}$  is a diffusion tensor.

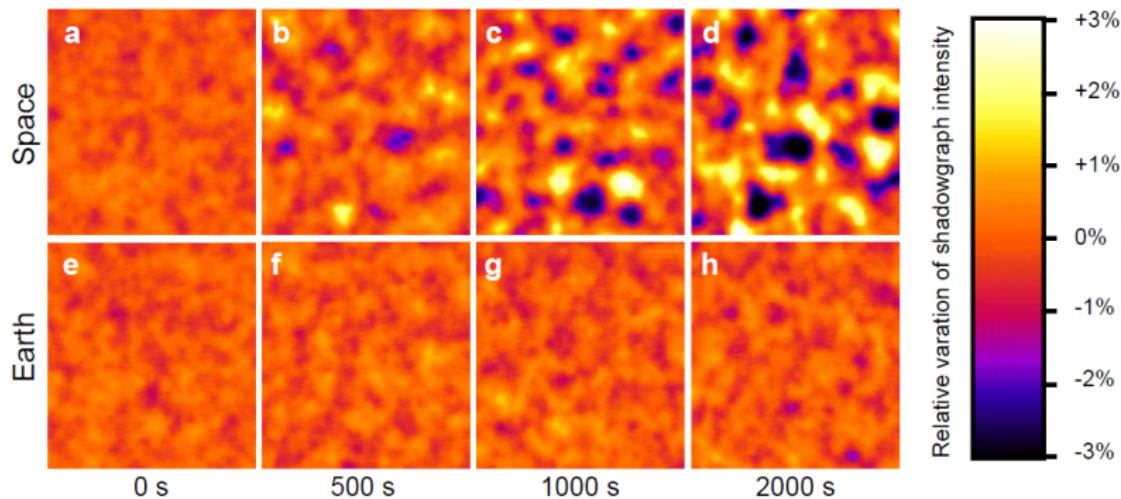
- But there is well-known hints that the **microscopic** origin of Fickian diffusion is **different in liquids** from that in gases or solids, and that **thermal velocity fluctuations** play a key role.
- The **Stokes-Einstein relation** connects mass diffusion to **momentum diffusion** (viscosity  $\eta$ ),

$$\chi \approx \frac{k_B T}{6\pi\sigma\eta},$$

where  $\sigma$  is a molecular diameter.

- Macroscopic diffusive fluxes in liquids are known to be accompanied by long-ranged nonequilibrium **giant** concentration **fluctuations** [1].

# Giant Nonequilibrium Fluctuations



Experimental results by A. Vailati *et al.* from a microgravity environment [1] showing the enhancement of concentration fluctuations in space (box scale is 5mm on the side, 1mm thick).

**Fluctuations become macroscopically large at macroscopic scales!**

They cannot be neglected as a microscopic phenomenon.

# Hydrodynamic Correlations

- The mesoscopic model we develop here applies, to a certain degree of accuracy, to two seemingly very different situations:
  - ① Molecular diffusion in binary fluid mixtures, notably, diffusion of **tagged particles** (e.g., fluorescently-labeled molecules in a FRAP experiment).
  - ② Diffusion of **colloidal particles** at low concentrations.
- The microscopic mechanism of molecular diffusion in liquids is different from that in either gases or solids due to the **effects of caging**:
  - ① The **Schmidt number is very large** (unlike gases) and particles remain trapped in their cage while fast molecular collisions (interactions) diffuse momentum and energy.
  - ② The breaking and movement of cages requires **collective (hydrodynamic) rearrangement** and thus the assumption of independent Brownian walkers is not appropriate.

This is well-appreciated in the colloidal literature and is described as hydrodynamic “interactions” (really, **hydrodynamic correlations**), but we will see that the same applies to molecular diffusion.

# Fluctuating Hydrodynamics

- The thermal velocity fluctuations are described by the (unsteady) **fluctuating Stokes equation**,

$$\rho \partial_t \mathbf{v} + \nabla \pi = \eta \nabla^2 \mathbf{v} + \sqrt{2\eta k_B T} \nabla \cdot \mathcal{W}, \quad \text{and} \quad \nabla \cdot \mathbf{v} = 0. \quad (1)$$

where the thermal (stochastic) momentum flux is spatio-temporal **white noise**,

$$\langle \mathcal{W}_{ij}(\mathbf{r}, t) \mathcal{W}_{kl}^*(\mathbf{r}', t') \rangle = (\delta_{ik} \delta_{jl} + \delta_{il} \delta_{jk}) \delta(t - t') \delta(\mathbf{r} - \mathbf{r}').$$

The solution of this SPDE is a white-in-space distribution (very far from smooth!).

- Define a **smooth advection velocity** field,  $\nabla \cdot \mathbf{u} = 0$ ,

$$\mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}, t) = \int \sigma(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{r}') \mathbf{v}(\mathbf{r}', t) d\mathbf{r}' \equiv \sigma \star \mathbf{v},$$

where the smoothing kernel  $\sigma$  filters out features at scales below a **molecular cutoff scale**  $\sigma$ .

# Resolved (Full) Dynamics

- **Lagrangian** description of a **passive tracer** diffusing in the fluid,

$$\dot{\mathbf{q}} = \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{q}, t) + \sqrt{2\chi_0} \mathcal{W}_{\mathbf{q}}, \quad (2)$$

where  $\mathcal{W}_{\mathbf{q}}(t)$  is a collection of white-noise processes (independent among tracers).

In this case  $\sigma$  is the typical size of the tracers.

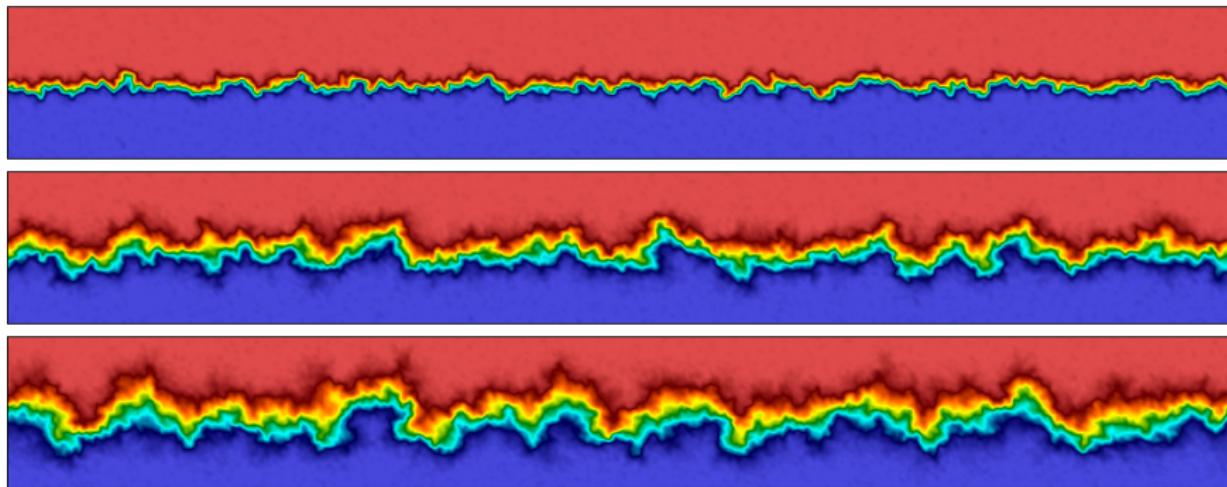
- **Eulerian** description of the **concentration**  $c(\mathbf{r}, t)$  with an (additive noise) fluctuating advection-diffusion equation,

$$\partial_t c = -\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla c + \chi_0 \nabla^2 c, \quad (3)$$

where  $\chi_0$  is the **bare diffusion coefficient**.

- The two descriptions are **equivalent**. When  $\chi_0 = 0$ ,  $c(\mathbf{q}(t), t) = c(\mathbf{q}(0), 0)$  or, due to reversibility,  $c(\mathbf{q}(0), t) = c(\mathbf{q}(t), 0)$ .

# Fractal Fronts in Diffusive Mixing



Snapshots of concentration in a miscible mixture showing the development of a *rough* diffusive interface due to the effect of **thermal fluctuations** [2]. These **giant fluctuations** have been studied experimentally [1] and with hard-disk molecular dynamics [3].

Our Goal: **Computational modeling of diffusive mixing in liquids in the presence of thermal fluctuations.**

# Separation of Time Scales

- In liquids molecules are caged (trapped) for long periods of time as they collide with neighbors:  
**Momentum and heat diffuse much faster than does mass.**
- This means that  $\chi \ll \nu$ , leading to a **Schmidt number**

$$S_c = \frac{\nu}{\chi} \sim 10^3 - 10^4.$$

This **extreme stiffness** solving the concentration/tracer equation numerically challenging.

- There exists a **limiting (overdamped) dynamics** for  $c$  in the limit  $S_c \rightarrow \infty$  in the scaling [4]

$$\chi^\nu = \text{const.}$$

# Eulerian Overdamped Dynamics

- Adiabatic mode elimination gives the following limiting **stochastic advection-diffusion equation** (reminiscent of the Kraichnan's model in turbulence),

$$\partial_t c = -\mathbf{w} \odot \nabla c + \chi_0 \nabla^2 c, \quad (4)$$

where  $\odot$  denotes a Stratonovich dot product.

- The advection velocity  $\mathbf{w}(\mathbf{r}, t)$  is **white in time**, with covariance proportional to a Green-Kubo integral of the velocity auto-correlation function,

$$\langle \mathbf{w}(\mathbf{r}, t) \otimes \mathbf{w}(\mathbf{r}', t') \rangle = 2\delta(t - t') \int_0^\infty \langle \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}, t) \otimes \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}', t + t') \rangle dt',$$

- In the Ito interpretation, there is **enhanced diffusion**,

$$\partial_t c = -\mathbf{w} \cdot \nabla c + \chi_0 \nabla^2 c + \nabla \cdot [\chi(\mathbf{r}) \nabla c] \quad (5)$$

where  $\chi(\mathbf{r})$  is an **analog of eddy diffusivity** in turbulence.

# Enhanced Diffusivity

- Let us factorize the integral of the velocity correlation function in some (infinite dimensional) set of basis functions  $\phi_k(\mathbf{r})$ ,

$$2 \int_0^\infty \langle \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}, t) \otimes \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}', t + t') \rangle dt' = \sum_k \phi_k(\mathbf{r}) \otimes \phi_k(\mathbf{r}').$$

For periodic boundaries  $\phi_k$  can be Fourier modes but in general they **depend on the boundary conditions** for the velocity.

- The notation  $\mathbf{w} \odot \nabla c$  is a short-hand for  $\sum_k (\phi_k \cdot \nabla c) \circ d\mathcal{B}_k/dt$ , where  $\mathcal{B}_k(t)$  are independent Brownian motions (Wiener processes).
- Similarly,  $\mathbf{w} \cdot \nabla c$  is shorthand notation for  $\sum_k (\phi_k \cdot \nabla c) d\mathcal{B}_k/dt$ .
- The enhanced or **fluctuation-induced diffusion** is

$$\chi(\mathbf{r}) = \int_0^\infty \langle \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}, t) \otimes \mathbf{u}(\mathbf{r}, t + t') \rangle dt' = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{k,k'} \phi_k(\mathbf{r}) \phi_{k'}(\mathbf{r}).$$

# Stokes-Einstein Relation

- An explicit calculation for **Stokes flow** gives the explicit result

$$\chi(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{k_B T}{\eta} \int \sigma(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{r}') \mathbf{G}(\mathbf{r}', \mathbf{r}'') \sigma^T(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{r}'') d\mathbf{r}' d\mathbf{r}'', \quad (6)$$

where  $\mathbf{G}$  is the Green's function for steady Stokes flow.

- For an appropriate filter  $\sigma$ , this gives **Stokes-Einstein formula** for the diffusion coefficient in a finite domain of length  $L$ ,

$$\chi = \frac{k_B T}{\eta} \begin{cases} (4\pi)^{-1} \ln \frac{L}{\sigma} & \text{if } d = 2 \\ (6\pi\sigma)^{-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sqrt{2}\sigma}{2L}\right) & \text{if } d = 3. \end{cases}$$

- The limiting dynamics is a good approximation if the effective Schmidt number  $S_c = \nu/\chi_{\text{eff}} = \nu/(\chi_0 + \chi) \gg 1$ .
- The fact that for many liquids Stokes-Einstein holds as a good approximation implies that  $\chi_0 \ll \chi$ :

**Diffusion in liquids is dominated by advection by thermal velocity fluctuations, and is more similar to eddy diffusion in turbulence than to standard Fickian diffusion.**

# Lagrangian Overdamped Dynamics

- In the Lagrangian description, the overdamped limit in the Stratonovich interpretation is

$$d\mathbf{q} = \sum_k \phi_k(\mathbf{q}) \circ d\mathcal{B}_k + \sqrt{2\chi_0} d\mathcal{B}_{\mathbf{q}}, \quad (7)$$

where  $\mathcal{B}_{\mathbf{q}}(t)$  are **independent** Brownian motions (one per tracer).

- The *single* realization of the random field  $\sum_k \phi_k \circ d\mathcal{B}_k$  affects *all* of the walkers and induces **correlations between the tracers**.
- In the Ito interpretation the Lagrangian description reverts to the well-known **Brownian dynamics** for the positions of the  $N$  tracers (Brownian walkers)  $\mathbf{Q} = \{\mathbf{q}_1, \dots, \mathbf{q}_N\}$ ,

$$d\mathbf{Q} = (2k_B T \mathbf{M}(\mathbf{Q}))^{\frac{1}{2}} d\mathcal{B} + (\partial_{\mathbf{Q}} \cdot \mathbf{M}(\mathbf{Q})) dt + \sqrt{2\chi_0} d\mathcal{B}_{\mathbf{Q}}, \quad (8)$$

where the **mobility matrix** has the form

$$\mathbf{M}_{ij}(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{q}_j) = \eta^{-1} \int \boldsymbol{\sigma}(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{r}') \mathbf{G}(\mathbf{r}', \mathbf{r}'') \boldsymbol{\sigma}^T(\mathbf{q}_j, \mathbf{r}'') d\mathbf{r}' d\mathbf{r}''.$$

# The Truth is in the Hydrodynamic Correlations

- In fact, we could have started from the equations of Brownian dynamics with the *assumption*

$$\mathbf{M}_{ij}(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{q}_j) = \frac{\mathcal{R}(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{q}_j)}{2k_B T} = \frac{1}{2k_B T} \sum_k \phi_k(\mathbf{q}_i) \phi_k(\mathbf{q}_j), \quad (9)$$

where  $\mathcal{R}(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{r}')$  is a **symmetric positive-definite kernel** that is divergence-free,  $\nabla \cdot \mathcal{R}(\mathbf{r}, \mathbf{r}') = 0$ .

- The **Rotne-Prager-Yamakawa tensor** widely used for dilute colloidal suspensions satisfies these properties; in the far field it is the **Oseen tensor**

$$\mathcal{R}(\mathbf{r}', \mathbf{r}'') \approx \frac{1}{8\pi r} (\mathbf{1} + \hat{\mathbf{r}} \otimes \hat{\mathbf{r}}) + O\left(\left(\frac{\sigma}{r}\right)^3\right) \text{ where } \mathbf{r} = \mathbf{r}' - \mathbf{r}''. \quad (10)$$

# The Truth contd.

- From (8,9) one can derive a closed **linear equation** for the empirical concentration  $c(\mathbf{r}, t) = \sum_{i=1}^N \delta(\mathbf{q}_i(t) - \mathbf{r})$  which is *exactly* the same as the one we derived taking the overdamped limit of our Eulerian description (fluctuating hydrodynamics).
- Strangely, if one assumes **uncorrelated walkers** the equation for  $c(\mathbf{r}, t)$  is seemingly closed but **nonlinear**!
- In both cases (hydrodynamically correlated and uncorrelated walkers) the mean obeys Fick's law but the fluctuations are completely different.
- This shows the subtle but crucial importance of the **incompressible hydrodynamic correlations** among the trajectories of the tracers.

# Multiscale Numerical Algorithm

The limiting dynamics can be efficiently simulated using the following **predictor-corrector algorithm** (implemented on GPUs):

- ① Generate a random advection velocity by solving **steady Stokes** [5] with random forcing,

$$\nabla \pi^{n+\frac{1}{2}} = \nu (\nabla^2 \mathbf{v}^n) + \Delta t^{-\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \cdot \left( \sqrt{2\nu\rho^{-1} k_B T} \mathcal{W}^n \right)$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{v}^n = 0.$$

using a staggered **finite-volume** fluctuating hydrodynamics solver [2], and compute  $\mathbf{u}^n = \sigma \star \mathbf{v}^n$  by filtering.

- ② Do a **predictor advection-diffusion solve** for concentration,

$$\frac{\tilde{c}^{n+1} - c^n}{\Delta t} = -\mathbf{u}^n \cdot \nabla c^n + \chi_0 \nabla^2 \left( \frac{c^n + \tilde{c}^{n+1}}{2} \right).$$

- ③ Take a **corrector step** for concentration,

$$\frac{c^{n+1} - c^n}{\Delta t} = -\mathbf{u}^n \cdot \nabla \left( \frac{c^n + \tilde{c}^{n+1}}{2} \right) + \chi_0 \nabla^2 \left( \frac{c^n + c^{n+1}}{2} \right).$$

# Lagrangian Algorithm

The tracer Lagrangian dynamics can be efficiently simulated **without artificial dissipation** (implemented on GPUs):

- ① Generate a random advection velocity by solving **steady Stokes** [5] with random forcing

$$\nabla \pi^{n+\frac{1}{2}} = \nu (\nabla^2 \mathbf{v}^n) + \Delta t^{-\frac{1}{2}} \nabla \cdot \left( \sqrt{2\nu\rho^{-1} k_B T} \mathcal{W}^n \right)$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{v}^n = 0.$$

using a **spectral** (FFT-based) algorithm.

- ② **Filter** the velocity with a Gaussian filter (in Fourier space),

$$\mathbf{w}^n = \sigma \star \mathbf{v}^n.$$

- ③ Use a **non-uniform FFT** [6] to evaluate  $\mathbf{u}^n = \mathbf{w}^n(\mathbf{q}^n)$ , and **move the tracers**,

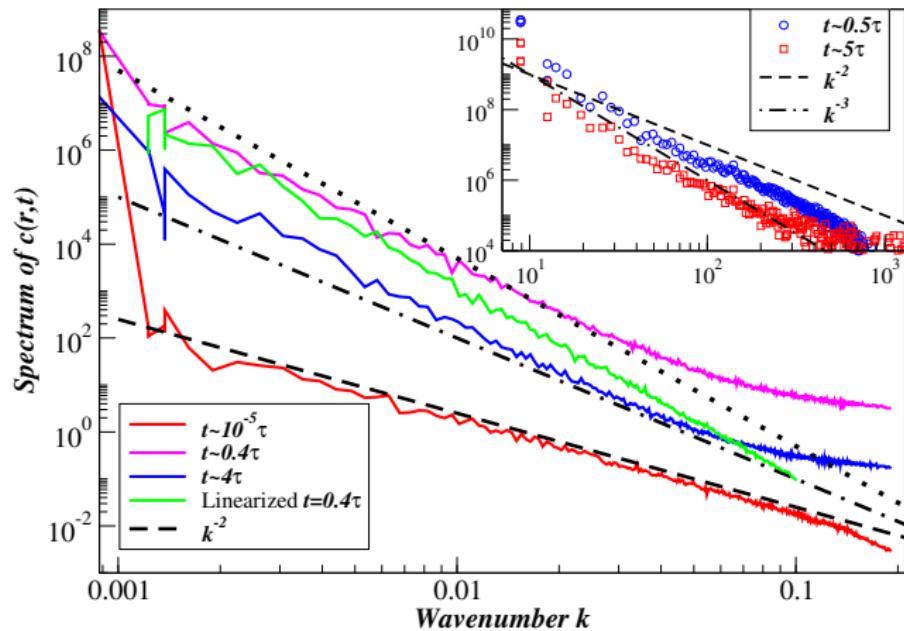
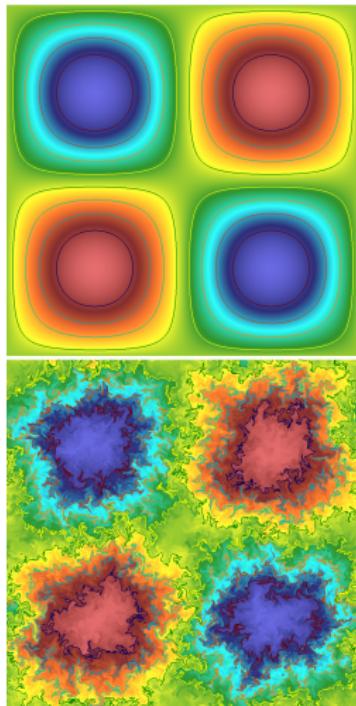
$$\mathbf{q}^{n+1} = \mathbf{q} + \mathbf{u}^n \Delta t.$$

In non-periodic domains one would need to do a corrector step for tracers (Euler-Heun method for the Stratonovich SDE).

# Numerical Issues

- ① All algorithms implemented on **GPUs** for periodic boundaries using **FFTs**. We do large simulations in **2D** here to study physics, **3D** is implemented but largest grid is  $O(512^3)$ .
- ② Eulerian algorithm also implemented in IBAMR library by Boyce Griffith, to be used for studying the effect of **boundary conditions** in experiments on giant fluctuations.
- ③ For Eulerian algorithm the difficulty is in the advection: we need essentially **non-dissipative advection** that is also **good with monotonicity preserving**.
- ④ Right now we use a strictly non-dissipative **centered advection**, for which we can calculate discrete diffusion enhancement operator exactly.
- ⑤ Also trying more sophisticated minimally-dissipative **semi-Lagrangian advection schemes** of John Bell implemented by Sandra May (unfinished).

# Is Diffusion Irreversible?



**Figure:** The decay of a single-mode initial condition, as obtained from a Lagrangian simulation with  $2048^2$  tracers.

# Effective Dissipation

- The **ensemble mean** of concentration follows **Fick's deterministic law**,

$$\partial_t \langle c \rangle = \nabla \cdot (\chi_{\text{eff}} \nabla \langle c \rangle) = \nabla \cdot [(\chi_0 + \chi) \nabla \langle c \rangle], \quad (11)$$

which is well-known from stochastic homogenization theory.

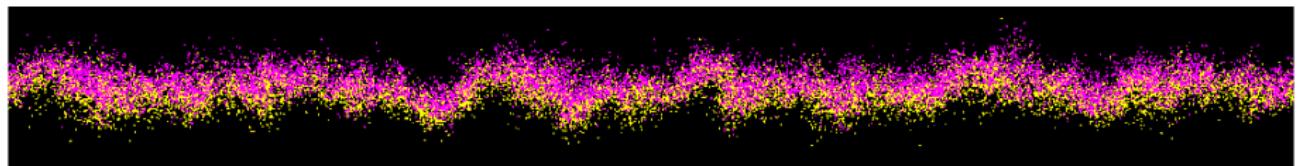
- The physical behavior of diffusion by thermal velocity fluctuations is very different from classical Fickian diffusion:  
**Standard diffusion ( $\chi_0$ ) is irreversible and dissipative, but diffusion by advection ( $\chi$ ) is reversible and conservative.**
- Spectral power is not decaying as in simple diffusion but is transferred to smaller scales, like in the turbulent **energy cascade**.
- This transfer of power is **effectively irreversible** because power “disappears”. *Can we make this more precise?*

# Virtual FREP Experiment ( $\chi_0 = 0$ )



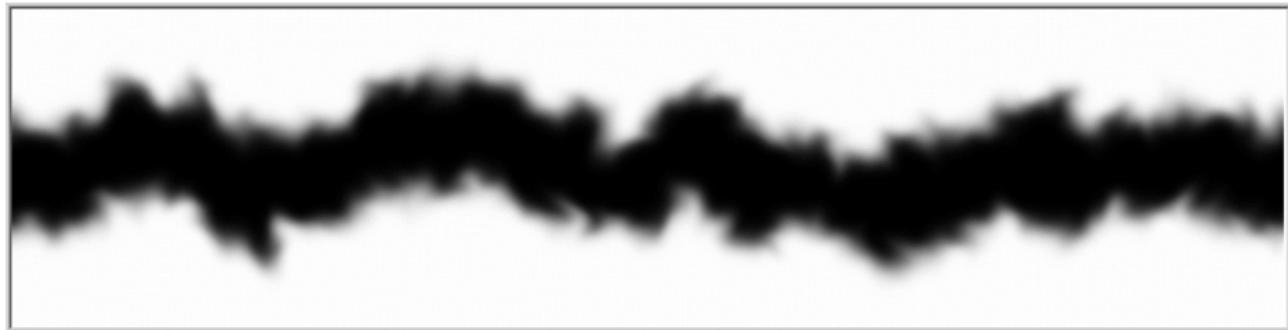
The **contour lines** become very **rough**, and eventually fill the whole plane, unless we put some bare diffusion to smooth things out.

But this generates **sub-molecular scale** features, compare to **hard-disk molecular dynamics** (1M disks):



We should perform **spatial coarse-graining** to study  $c_\delta = \delta \star c$ , where  $\delta > \sigma$  is a mesoscopic **measurement (observation) scale**.

# Lagrangian Tracking of Interfaces



# Spatial Coarse-Graining

- Split the velocity  $\mathbf{w}$  into a large-scale component  $\mathbf{w}_\delta$  and a small-scale component  $\tilde{\mathbf{w}}$ ,

$$\mathbf{w} = \delta \star \mathbf{w} + \tilde{\mathbf{w}} = \mathbf{w}_\delta + \tilde{\mathbf{w}} \text{ in law,}$$

where  $\delta$  is a filter of **mesoscopic** width  $\delta > \sigma$ .

- Define  $\bar{c}_\delta = \langle c \rangle_{\tilde{\mathbf{w}}}$  as the **conditional ensemble average** over the unresolved  $\tilde{\mathbf{w}}$  keeping the resolved  $\mathbf{w}_\delta$  fixed.
- For the Ito equation (5), **without any approximations**, we obtain,

$$\partial_t \bar{c}_\delta = -\mathbf{w}_\delta \cdot \nabla \bar{c}_\delta + \chi_0 \nabla^2 \bar{c}_\delta + \nabla \cdot [\chi(\mathbf{r}) \nabla \bar{c}_\delta], \quad (12)$$

with an identical effective diffusion coefficient  $\chi_{\text{eff}} = \chi_0 + \chi$ .

- We **postulate** that this gives a physically reasonable **coarse-grained model** for  $c_\delta = \delta \star c$ .

# Coarse-Grained Equations

- In the Stratonovich interpretation the **coarse-grained equation** is

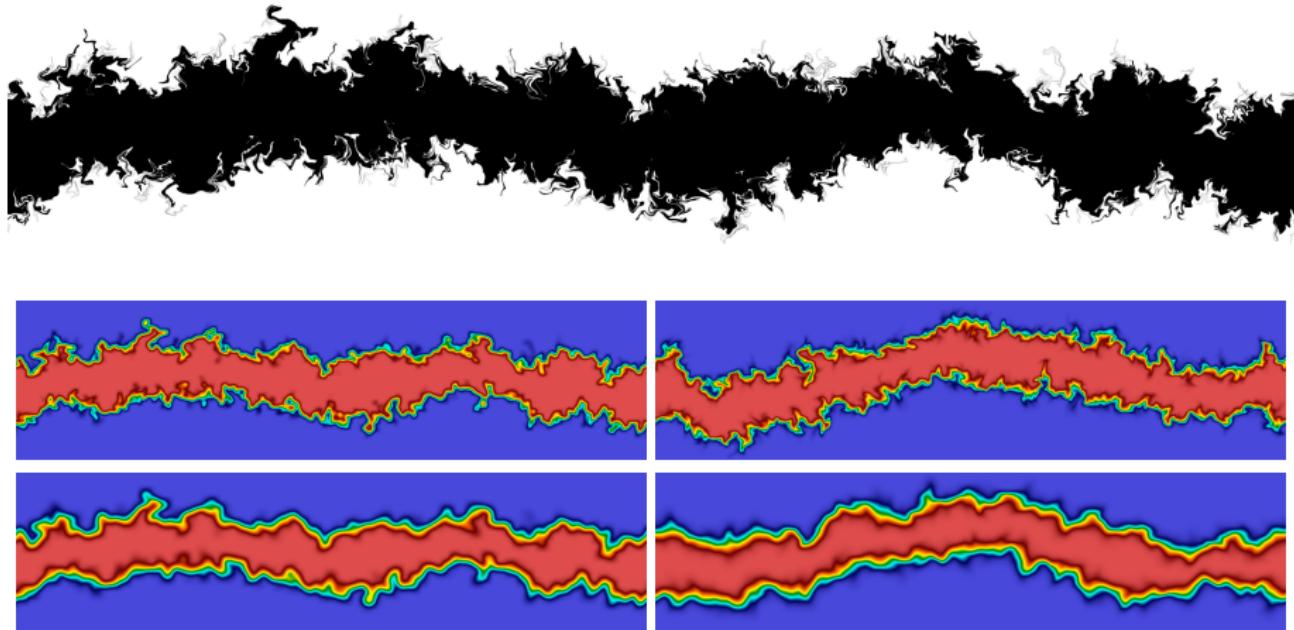
$$\partial_t c_\delta \approx -\mathbf{w}_\delta \odot \nabla c_\delta + \nabla \cdot [(\chi_0 + \Delta\chi_\delta) \nabla c_\delta], \quad (13)$$

where the **diffusion renormalization**  $\Delta\chi_\delta(\mathbf{r})$  [7, 8] is

$$\Delta\chi_\delta = \chi - \delta * \chi * \delta^T. \quad (14)$$

- The coarse-grained equation has **true dissipation** (irreversibility) since  $\Delta\chi_\delta > 0$ .
- For  $\delta \gg \sigma$  in three dimensions we get  $\Delta\chi_\delta \approx \chi$  and so the coarse-grained equation becomes Fick's law with Stokes-Einstein's form for the diffusion coefficient. This hints that  
**In three dimensions (but not in two dimensions!) at macroscopic scales Fick's law applies. At mesoscopic scales fluctuating hydrodynamics with renormalized transport coefficients is a good model.**

# Irreversible vs. Reversible Dynamics



**Figure:** (Top panel) Diffusive mixing studied using the Lagrangian tracer algorithm. (Bottom) The spatially-coarse grained concentration  $c_\delta$  obtained by blurring with a Gaussian filter of two different widths.

# Conclusions

- Fluctuations are **not just a microscopic phenomenon**: giant fluctuations can reach macroscopic dimensions or certainly dimensions much larger than molecular.
- **Fluctuating hydrodynamics** describes these effects.
- Due to **large separation of time scales** between mass and momentum diffusion we need to find the **limiting dynamics** to eliminate the stiffness.
- The **overdamped equation** is a stochastic advection-diffusion equation with a white-in-time velocity.
- Diffusion in liquids is strongly affected and in fact dominated by **advection by velocity fluctuations**.
- This kind of “eddy” diffusion is very different from Fickian diffusion: it is **reversible** (conservative) **rather than irreversible** (dissipative)!
- At **macroscopic scales**, however, one expects to recover **Fick's deterministic law**, in three, but not in two dimensions.

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