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Gerner, van, H.J.; van der Hoef, M.A.; Meer, van der, D.; Weele, van der, J.P.

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Inversion of Chladni patterns by tuning the vibrational acceleration

Henk Jan van Gerner, 1, * Martin A. van der Hoef, 1 Devaraj van der Meer, 1 and Ko van der Weele 2

1 Faculty of Science and Technology and J.M. Burgers Centre for Fluid Dynamics, University of Twente, P.O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede, The Netherlands
2 Department of Mathematics, University of Patras, 26500 Patras, Greece

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Inverse Chladni patterns, i.e., grains collecting at the antinodes of a resonating plate, are traditionally believed to occur only when the particles are small enough to be carried along by the ambient air. We now show—theoretically and numerically—that air currents are not the only mechanism leading to inverse patterns: When the acceleration of the resonating plate does not exceed g, particles will always roll to the antinodes, irrespective of their size, even in the absence of air. We also explain why this effect has hitherto escaped detection in standard Chladni experiments.

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Introduction. A classic way of visualizing standing waves is by sprinkling sand or salt on a horizontal plate and bring it into resonance by, e.g., a violin bow. The particles will move to the nodal lines, giving rise to the famous Chladni patterns, by now a standard high-school demonstration experiment [1,2]. Much less known is that very fine particles will move to the antinodes: This was already noted by Chladni himself, who observed that tiny hair shavings from his violin bow were carried to the antinodes, and systematically studied by Faraday with the use of lycopodium powder [3]. He and others showed that the inverse Chladni pattern of fine particles is due to air currents induced by the vibrating plate [3–6], which drag the particles along to the antinodes.

In this paper we give a proof-of-principle that all particles—also large ones for which the effect of air can be ignored—are able to form inverse Chladni patterns, by a completely different mechanism: If the vibrational acceleration of the plate remains below g, their movement due to the vibration is directed toward the antinodes. In other words, one can switch from standard to inverted Chladni patterns simply by tuning the acceleration of the resonating plate. We demonstrate this analytically and confirm it by numerical simulation. We also propose how the phenomenon might be observed experimentally, which turns out to be difficult but not impossible.

Numerical simulations. The simulated system consists of a flexible rectangular plate on which 80 000 glass beads (ρ =2.50 × 10^3 kg/m^3, diameter 1.0 mm) are uniformly distributed. The plate is fixed along its outer rim. We excite a standing wave pattern by applying one of the natural frequencies ω_kl of the plate, corresponding to k sinusoidal half-wavelengths in the x direction and l in the y direction. Ignoring the additional bending of the plate under its own weight (we come back to this later), the vertical deflection at position (x, y) is then given by:

\[ z(x, y, t) = a \sin(\omega_k t) \sin \left( \frac{k\pi x}{L_x} \right) \sin \left( \frac{l\pi y}{L_y} \right), \]  

(1)

(with k, l=1, 2, 3, ...), where a is the amplitude of the vibration and L_x, L_y=62 cm the size of the plate. As an example, in Fig. 1, we have excited the 2×2 mode, which for a typical stainless steel plate of 1 mm thickness has a natural frequency of f_22(ω_22/2π)=50 Hz [9].

The trajectories of the particles are calculated via a Granular Dynamics code [7], in which the collisions (with the plate, and between the particles themselves) are taken care of by a three–dimensional soft sphere model including tangential friction. The results do not depend sensitively on the precise values of the coefficients of friction and (normal and tangential) restitution, which are set to 0.20, 0.90, and 0.33, respectively, both for the particle–plate and particle–particle interactions. Our key parameter is the dimensionless acceleration Γ=ω_kl^2/g, i.e., the ratio of the (maximal) vibrational and the gravitational acceleration. For a given mode, with a prescribed frequency ω_kl, the value of Γ is varied via the amplitude a.

Figure 1(a) shows the final pattern when the plate is given

![Image](image-url)

FIG. 1. (a) Top view of a flexible plate resonating in its 2×2 mode, at 50 Hz, with an amplitude of 0.40 mm (dimensionless acceleration Γ=4.0). After 4 s most particles have collected at the nodal lines, forming a classic Chladni pattern. (b) The same plate at a smaller amplitude of 0.09 mm (Γ=0.91). The particles now migrate from the nodal lines to the anti-nodes and after 1 min an inverse Chladni pattern has formed. A movie of the formation process can be found in [8].
an amplitude of 0.40 mm (Γ = 4.0). In this case the local
dimensionless acceleration is larger than unity over a size-
able region around the antinodes, with a maximum of 4.0 at
the antinodes themselves. The particles in these regions start
to bounce and the bounces tend (on average) to increase their
kinetic energy. On the other hand, at the nodal lines the di-
mensionless acceleration is zero and the inelastic collisions
with the plate reduce the kinetic energy of the particles; this
effect is further enhanced by the mutual particle-particle col-
sions. Starting with all 80,000 particles uniformly distrib-
uted over the plate, within seconds most of them have mi-
greated to the nodal lines, forming a standard Chladni pattern.

If we reduce the amplitude to a = 0.09 mm [Γ = 0.91, Fig.
1(b)], the particles stop bouncing and start to roll toward the
antinodes. The motion gradually speeds up and after about
one minute most of the particles have accumulated at the
antinodes, forming an inverse Chladni pattern. We have per-
formed simulations also at other resonant frequencies, al-
ways with the same outcome: a standard pattern for Γ > 1,
and an inverted one for Γ ≤ 1. So the pattern can be tuned by
amplitude only.

Theory. Why do the particles move to the antinodes for accelerations below 1 g, i.e., when they do not bounce? The explanation must lie in the fact that—as long as the particles remain in contact with the plate—the horizontal force on the particles, averaged over a complete vibration cycle, points toward the antinodes. In our analysis we assume the particles roll without slipping. We further ignore the influence of the ambient air, which is a good approximation for 1-mm glass spheres. Finally, we ignore the bending of the plate under its own weight and that of the particles, as well as the slight modification of the plate’s resonant mode due to the presence of the particles [10].

For Γ = 1 the particles do not detach from the plate and their vertical position is given by the same Eq. (1) as for the plate, except that x and y are now functions of time. For simplicity, let us for the moment only consider the x direction, so the vertical position of a particle is:

\[ z(x,t) = a \sin(\omega_t t) \frac{k \pi x(t)}{L_x}, \quad k,l = 1,2,3, \ldots \]  

The up-and-down motion of the plate affects the particle’s effective weight \( W \) [12]:

\[ W(x,t) = -m \left[ g + \ddot{z}(x,t) \right] \]

\[ \approx -m \left[ g - a \omega^2 \sin(\omega_t t) \frac{k \pi x(t)}{L_x} \right], \quad (3) \]

where \( m \) is the mass of the particle, and the minus sign indicates that \( W \) is a force pointing in the negative z direction. Its magnitude \( |W| \) oscillates around \( mg \). It can be split in two components: one parallel to the plate \( W_{\parallel} \), which is counteracted by the normal force \( F_n \) on the particle, and a perpendicular component \( W_{\perp} \) which gives the particle an acceleration along the plate’s surface.

The forces \( W_{\perp}, F_n, \) and \( W_{\parallel} \) are shown in Fig. 2 at two different instants. In Fig. 2(a) the plate is accelerating upward at the location of the particle, so \( |W| > mg \). In Fig. 2(b) it is accelerating downward, so now \( |W| < mg \). As a result, the component parallel to the plate \( (W_{\parallel}) \) is larger in Fig. 2(a) than in Fig. 2(b), hence the acceleration averaged over a complete vibration cycle is directed toward the antinodes.

Substituting this result in the translational equation of motion, we also find the friction force: \( f = \frac{1}{2} W_{\parallel} \). To ensure that the particle will not slip, the particles and plate must be chosen such that the coefficient of static friction between them (\( \mu_s \)) is able to deliver this force [14]. Since the maximum force of static friction equals \( \mu_s W_{\perp} \), this means that we require \( \mu_s \geq f/W_{\perp} = \frac{1}{2} W_{\parallel} \sin \phi/W \cos \phi = \frac{1}{2} \tan \phi \). Since \( \phi \) always remains small, the above condition is easily fulfilled; e.g., steel beads on a steel plate \( (\mu_s = 0.74) \) will do fine.

To calculate the average horizontal acceleration over a complete cycle, we must integrate Eq. (5) from \( t=0 \) to \( 2\pi/\omega_t \). Compared to the wavelength of the plate, the change in \( x \) position of a particle during one cycle is very small and we may treat \( x(t) \) as a constant. This gives:

![Image](image-url)
the migration of particles beginning at the nodes in top view. The acceleration field is directed to the nodal lines, this explains the observed diagonal migration of the particles. Under normal circumstances, the deflection of the middle of the plate due to its own weight will be overpowering any tendency to form inverse Chladni patterns. Why is it then that no one has ever reported this observation, even though the Chladni plate is a well-known and often conducted experiment? We discuss this point in more detail below.

Experimental considerations. Our simulations and theoretical analysis show that inverse Chladni patterns are not reserved to fine dust particles that are swept along by the air currents around the resonating plate. Large beads (on which the air currents have no effect whatsoever) can form inverse Chladni patterns too. Why is it then that no one has ever reported this observation, even though the Chladni plate is a well-known and often conducted experiment? We discuss two important reasons.

The first reason stems from the fact that the plate must be perfectly horizontal: Even a small deviation may already outweigh the tiny vibration amplitudes imposed by the condition \( \Gamma < 1 \) [typically one-tenth of a millimeter or less, cf. Figure 1(b)]. At the outer rims of the plate this is just a question of accurate alignment, but the horizontality is also affected by the bending of the plate under its own weight and that of the particles. Under normal circumstances, the deflection of the middle of the plate due to its own weight will be considerably larger than the largest admissible vibration amplitude \( a \), so the particles will simply roll toward the center, overpowering any tendency to form inverse Chladni patterns.

The deflection for a square plate of dimensions \( L \times L \), density \( \rho \), and thickness \( h \) is given by [17]:

\[
d_{\text{bend}} = 0.0046 \frac{g \rho h L^4}{D},
\]

where \( D = Eh^3/12(1 - \nu^2) \) is the stiffness of the plate, with \( E \) the elastic modulus and \( \nu \) Poisson’s ratio [18]. This is to be compared with the largest admissible vibration amplitude \( a_{\text{max}} = g/\omega_{ji} \) (from the condition \( \Gamma < 1 \)), with the frequency of the \( k \times l \) mode being given by \( \omega_{kl} = (k^2 + l^2) \pi^2 L^{-2} (D/\rho h)^{1/2} \) [9], so
\[ a_{\text{max}} = \frac{1}{(k^2 + l^2)^2 \pi^2} \frac{gphL^4}{D}. \]  

Interestingly, the ratio \( R = \frac{a_{\text{band}}}{a_{\text{max}}} = 0.00406 (k^2 + l^2)^2 \pi^4 \) is independent of the material properties or plate dimensions: It only depends on the mode that is excited. For the 2 \times 2 mode one finds \( R = 25.3 \), and even for the 1 \times 1 mode the ratio is still 1.58 [19]. It is therefore necessary to experimentally suppress the deflection of the plate by raising the air pressure below the plate by an amount \( gph \) N/m\(^2\) (the plate’s weight per square meter). Apart from that, it is preferable to work with a limited number of particles.

The second reason concerns the minimum force required to set a particle in rolling motion. This force is equal to \( \mu_r W_{\perp} \), with \( \mu_r \) the coefficient of pre-rolling friction [20], so we require \( W_{\parallel} > \mu_r W_{\perp} \). It is clearly advantageous to choose the particles and plate such that \( \mu_r \) is small, i.e., both of them should hardly deform. For steel particles on a steel plate its value is in the order of \( \mu_r = 0.002–0.003 \), if proper care is taken to eliminate disturbing effects such as the formation of liquid bridges due to humidity or a liquid film on particle and plate.

Now, \( W_{\perp} \) is approximately equal to \( mg \), and for the parallel force we use \( W_{\|} = \frac{1}{2} m(\ddot{x}) \) with \( \ddot{x} \) given by Eq. (6). In fact we use its maximum value, at the moments when \( \sin(4\pi x(t)/L_1) = 1 \), and with \( \Gamma = 1 \). The condition for setting the particles in rolling motion then takes the form \( k\pi g/4L_1^2 \approx \mu_r \). Inserting the expression for \( a_{\text{band}} \) given above Eq. (8), this yields the following condition for the size of the plate:

\[ L \approx \left[ \frac{4(k^2 + l^2)^2 \pi^2 D}{kgh \mu_r} \right]^{1/3}. \]

For the 2 \times 2 mode \((k = l = 2)\) on a steel plate of thickness \( h = 1 \times 10^{-3} \) m (the same as in the simulations of Fig. 1) this is readily evaluated to give \( L \approx 10 \mu_1^{1/3} \) [18]. With \( \mu_r = 0.003 \), to be on the safe side, this means that the size of the plate must be at least \( 1.45 \times 1.45 \) m\(^2\).

The above requirements (the pressurization below the plate, and its large size) are demanding but not forbidding. It will be highly interesting to perform the experiment and witness the inverse Chladni pattern in real.

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[8] See supplementary material at http://link.aps.org/supplemental/10.1103/PhysRevE.82.012301 for a video showing the formation of the Chladni and inverse Chladni patterns of Fig. 1.


[10] The influence of their collective mass on the resonant mode may in fact give the particles some extra drive towards the antinodes. A related effect is observed in soap films excited by a sound wave, where the mass distribution (self-adapting the film’s resonant mode to the excitation frequency) concentrates at the antinodes [11].


[12] We neglect the terms in \( \ddot{\xi} \) with amplitudes \((2k\pi/L_1)(\ddot{x}), (2k\pi/2L_2)(\ddot{x}), \) and \((k\pi/L_1)(\ddot{x})\). For \( k = 2 \) all these terms are much smaller than \( g \).


[14] When a particle rolls without slipping, its point of contact with the plate is instantaneously at rest, so the friction force is a static (not a dynamic) one.

[15] At first sight the mechanism described here is reminiscent of the drift of particles floating on a resonating water surface [16], which also happen to cluster in Chladni patterns, either standard or inverted ones. However, for floating particles the distinction between the two types of patterns is due to capillarity effects, not to a variation of \( \Gamma \). Hydrophilic particles gather at the nodes of the water surface (forming a standard Chladni pattern), whereas hydrophobic particles go to the antinodes [16].


[18] A stainless steel plate has density \( \rho = 7.8 \times 10^3 \) kg/m\(^3\) and stiffness \( D = 18.3 \) kg m\(^2\)/s\(^2\) (elastic modulus \( E = 20 \times 10^{10} \) Pa, Poisson’s ratio \( v = 0.30 \)).

[19] The 1 \times 1 mode has only one antinode, at the center of the plate, so in this case the inverse-Chladni mechanism and the natural tendency to roll towards the lowest bending point both direct the particles to the central position. This makes the 1 \times 1 mode less suited to demonstrate the inverse Chladni pattern.

[20] For rolling friction, similar as for sliding friction, the static pre-rolling coefficient exceeds the dynamic coefficient which holds when the particle is already rolling. See e.g. K. G. Budinski, Wear 259, 1443 (2005); K. de Moerlooze and F. Al-Bender, Adv. in Tribology Vol. 2008, 561280 (2008).