Extracting the Green function from diffuse, equipartitioned waves

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A ballistic pulse launched in a strongly scattering random medium becomes diffusive after a few mean-free times. In this regime of diffusive propagation there is a net flux of energy away from the source. Eventually the flux goes to zero, in the *equipartitioned* regime, in which the signal consists of equal amounts of energy propagating in all directions. In this regime the two-point, two-time correlation of the wave-field should equal the sum of the advanced and retarded Green functions associated with the average medium. We observe the emergence of the Green function from this correlation at about 9 mean-free times in a highly heterogeneous rock sample.

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Conventional imaging in media with strong scattering, such as rocks, can be difficult because coherent signals (e.g., directly arriving waves) are strongly attenuated by the scattering [1]. Theoretically it is possible to obtain imaging information from averages (over the randomness of the medium) of the correlation of the diffuse field [2]. In practice, however, it can be difficult to separate the diffuse field from the ambient noise of the experiment. The complicated nature of rock structure makes this particularly difficult since—we believe the scattering structure of the rock to be random—we have no knowledge of the distribution or nature of the scatterers.

In 1950 Wiesner and Lee [3] showed that the Green function (GF) of any linear system can be obtained by driving the system with random noise and cross-correlating the noise input with the output. In helioseismology, Rickett and Claer-bout [4] and Duval *et al.* [5] have used a related idea to synthesize acoustic waves inside the sun. More recently, Lobbis and Weaver [2] showed how the GF can be retrieved from the correlations of an equipartitioned (EP) thermal phonon field using a modal expansion, and used this idea [2,6] to compute the elastic GF. Campillo and Paul [7] used the same idea to extract the GF from the seismic coda. Here we pursue a laboratory experiment using a coarse-grained rock as a random medium in which the strong multiple scattering generates the necessary EP and study the time symmetry of the correlation function.

Imagine an ultrasonic pulse launched from the origin in the $x$-direction of an infinite random medium. Assume that intrinsic attenuation is weak relative to scattering so that the whole range of multiple-scattering behavior can be seen before the signal is dominated by noise. Define a scan region $S$ some distance from the origin in which one measures the elastic wave-field $u(r,t)$. Before the source energy has reached the scan region, the elastic intensity in $S$, $\int_S |u|^2 \, d^3r$, is equal to some background or ambient level. Once the source pulse enters $S$, the intensity shoots up and then begins to decay once the pulse has left $S$. We refer to this spike in intensity (associated with non-scattered energy) as the ballistic regime. After several mean-free times, the intensity begins to decay diffusively with time, as multiple scattering slows the transport of energy out of the scan region. This is the *diffusion regime*. Later, after many mean-free times, the flux of energy out of $S$ falls to zero, but the energy averaged over $S$ is still above the background level. This is the *equipartitioning regime* since the wave-field has no preferred wavenumber. This is in contrast with the equipartitioning among the $P$ and $S$ polarizations that sets in much earlier [8–10]. Eventually, intrinsic attenuation dominates and the energy falls to the noise level.

In the Physical Acoustics Laboratory at CSM we study ultrasonic wave propagation in heterogeneous media such as rocks and engineered composites using non-contacting ultrasonic laser sources and detectors. See Ref. [11] for an overview of our laboratory setup. The results shown here come from an experiment performed on a 135 $\times$ 54 mm cylinder of coarse-grained Llano granite. Although structures such as layering and large mineral inclusions are common in rocks, this particular rock is a relatively uniform mixture of grains averaging about 3–5 mm in diameter. In Ref. [11] we showed that the mean-free time in this type of rock around 1 MHz, averaged over bulk and surface waves, is about 2.9 $\mu$s (mean-free path about 9 mm) and that the average intensity is well fit by a diffusion model after a few mean-free times. We collected data at 5 locations ranging from 5 to 25 mm from the source position; the source-detector configuration is shown in Fig. 1(a). Fig. 1(b) shows an example of the data collected. To generate the necessary ensemble of measurements, we placed the sample on a rotational stage and collected data every 5°, on nine lines separated vertically by about 3 mm.
When energy is traveling diffusively in a medium, a net energy flux exists in the direction of propagation. Once the field is EP there is no net energy transport and so the energy flux is zero. Thus, we shall characterize the EP regime as the time between when the flux decays to zero and that when the signal has relaxed to the ambient level after about 50 \( \mu \)s. As we will see below, we can use the ensemble-averaged time-correlation function measured at two detector positions 5 mm apart to locate the EP regime.

The ensemble-averaged time-correlation function measured at two detector positions 5 mm apart at the surface was investigated in the ballistic, the diffusive and in the EP regime. The vertical component of particle velocity at the surface rapidly attenuates than surface waves and because we record the signal has relaxed to the ambient noise level. The intensity is time between when the flux decays to zero and that when the flux is zero. Thus, we shall characterize the EP regime as the field is EP there is no net energy transport and so the energy flux is zero. The ensemble-averaged time-correlation function measured at two detector positions 5 mm apart at the surface.

Figure 2 shows a portion of the multiply scattered signal used in this experiment.

FIG. 2. Time correlation function in three different 30 \( \mu \)s windows of the recorded data. Data from the two detectors furthest from the source are used. The time used in the top panel (beginning at 5 \( \mu \)s, \( R/ct=0.40 \)) is too early to see the acoustical component, and the correlation is asymmetric. Between the times in the middle panel (beginning at 12.5 \( \mu \)s, \( R/ct=0.29 \)) and the last panel (beginning at 25 \( \mu \)s, \( R/ct=0.20 \)), the field becomes equipartitioned. The vertical lines indicate the expected arrival time of the surface wave, based on independent surface-wave velocity estimates.

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Transport theory makes the following statement for its auto-correlation function at two different frequencies, \( \omega \pm \frac{1}{2} \Omega \), and at two different wave numbers, \( \mathbf{k} \pm \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{q} \).

\[
\left\langle u\left(\omega + \frac{1}{2} \Omega, \mathbf{k} + \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{q}\right) u\left(\omega - \frac{1}{2} \Omega, \mathbf{k} - \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{q}\right) \right\rangle = -\frac{S(\omega)}{i \Omega + D q^2} \left[ 1 + \frac{c}{i \omega} \delta(\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{q} + ...) \right].
\]
EXTRACTING THE GREEN FUNCTION FROM DIFFUSE...

trum of the source and the spectral function. As a result, at
given frequency, the different possible modes are EP. Finally,
the \((\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{q})\) term indicates that a macroscopic diffuse gradient,
expressed by \(\mathbf{q}\), can locally destroy this microscopic EP.

We can now easily translate back to space-time. Let us
denote by \(C(x, \tau)\) the velocity autocorrelation function
\(\langle \partial_\mu (r + \frac{1}{2} x, t + \frac{1}{2} \tau) \partial_\mu (r - \frac{1}{2} x, t - \frac{1}{2} \tau) \rangle\) as measured in this paper.
We find from (2),

\[
C(x, \tau) = \int \frac{d\omega}{2\pi} \int \frac{dk}{(2\pi)^3} e^{i \mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{x} - i\omega \tau} - i\omega
+ ic\ell(\mathbf{k} \cdot \partial_x) \rho_x(r, t) \Delta G(\omega, \mathbf{k}),
\]

with \(\rho_x(r, t)\) the diffuse displacement energy at time \(t\) and at
distance \(r\) from the source. If we assume that both the source
power function and the scattering properties hardly vary over
the chosen bandwidth, then the above expression simplifies to

\[
C(x, \tau) = [\partial_x + c\ell(\partial_x \cdot \partial_x)] \rho_x(r, t) \{G(x, \tau) - G(x, -\tau)\}
\]

This formula relates the velocity auto-correlation to the
(band-limited) GF \(G\) of the displacement. The time-
derivative generates a time-symmetric contribution
—recognized as the velocity GF —expressing the perfect EP
field; the spatial derivative gives an antisymmetric contribution,
proportional to the spatial gradient of the intensity. By
insertion of the typical solution \(\rho \sim \exp(-R^2/4Dt)\) of the
diffusion equation we can check that the ratio \(\alpha\) of the causal
\((\tau > 0)\) to the anti-causal term \((\tau < 0)\) is of order \(\alpha = (1 + 3R/2ct)/(1 - 3R/2ct)\) at the elapsed time \(t\).
This analysis shows that the correlation function is very asymmetric at
early times but that the asymmetry should slowly fade away with
time.

Equation (4) is valid for a three-dimensional (3D) infinite
random medium and is overly simplified to apply to a hetero-
egeneous rock with surface detection. In optics the transition
from diffuse to ballistic motion at the boundaries is a
erogeneous rock with surface detection. In optics the transi-
random medium and is overly simplified to apply to a het-

In Fig. 2(b), the ratio of the causal to anti-causal peak is
\(\alpha_{\text{exp}} = 1/0.32 = 3.13\). In this figure, \(R/ct\) declines from 0.6 to
0.2, giving theoretical ratios \(\alpha_{\text{theo}}(\delta=1)\) ranging from 6.4 to

1.6. This illustrates the sensitivity of \(\alpha\) to the elapsed time
which varies considerably inside the windows used for the
correlation. As a result a quantitative comparison between
theory and experiment to retrieve \(\delta\) is inconclusive. If we
adopt the value \(R/ct=0.2\) at late times, this would yield a
value of \(\delta=2.2\) to get agreement with theory. This would
imply a diffusion coefficient (and thus a mean free path)
roughly twice as large for surface waves as for shear waves.

In the recovered GF the surface wave arrives at times
much smaller than the time-span of the portion of the data
exhibiting EP. We can exploit this fact to increase the number
of ensemble measurements used to construct the GF [19],
by using multiple windows. This results in the GFs shown in
Fig. 3. This figure confirms the expected linear change in
arrival time with detector-detector offset. The fact that the
surface waves can still be identified at distances as large as
20 mm implies that their mean-free-path \(\ell_s\) is larger than the
9 mm estimated for the bulk \(\ell_s\) from a fit to radiative transfer
[11]. This is again consistent with \(\delta=2\) implying \(\ell_R\)
\(\approx 18\) mm.

From intensity measurements we find that the signal has
decayed to the ambient noise level after about 100 \(\mu s\). Some of
the GFs in Fig. 3 use much later times, however. This
indicates that either we are too conservative in our noise
level estimate or that the noise itself is EP, allowing us to
extract the GF even directly from the noise. Even with EP
noise, we do not expect to extract the GF from the noise in
our experiment, since the different measurements are taken
at different times. We have independently measured the quality
factor of the sample to be about 80, indicating that at late
times we should be in the noise. Extracting ballistic waves
from EP noise is a fascinating result that requires further
study.

FIG. 3. Time correlation function for different offsets, each using
3 windows 30 \(\mu s\) in length. Top panel: Offset 5 mm, windows
starting at 17.5 \(\mu s\), \(R/ct=0.1\). Second panel: Offset 10 mm, win-
dows starting at 30, 120, and 190 \(\mu s\), \(R/ct=0.06\). Third panel: Off-
set 15 mm, windows starting at 80 \(\mu s\) with \(R/ct=0.13\). Bottom panel:
Offset 20 mm, windows starting at 157.5 \(\mu s\), with \(R/ct
\approx 0.03\). To ensure that each window represents an independent member
of the ensemble, a 5 \(\mu s\) gap is left between consecutive windows.
In Fig. 4 we compare the retrieved detector-detector GF to a direct measurement of the GF using an active source. What is most notable is the lower frequency content of the former. A very likely explanation for this is that the spectrum of the source decays with frequency, as we know is the case in our experiment. This affects the retrieved GF more than the directly measured one.

Because correlation is formally identical to time-reversal [18] we expect that only the phase plays a role in extracting the GF through correlations of the field. We confirm this by comparing the results above [Fig. 3(c)] with correlations obtained from the same data reduced to the sign bit shown in Fig. 5.

In conclusion, we have retrieved the ensemble averaged GF for ultrasonic waves traveling between two detectors in a strongly scattering medium by exploiting the multiple-scattering. Through the observed symmetry of the retrieved GF, we are able to determine whether or not the field itself is EP. We have also shown that the results hold when single bit data are used in place of higher precision measurements. A future direction of this work is to extract the GF in an even more complex medium, such as one containing an object to be imaged.

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[19] An n-length segment of the data gives the GF for the 2n+1 time points centered at time zero.