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Shashi Thutupalli

Towards Autonomous Soft Matter Systems

Experiments on Membranes and Active
Emulsions

Doctoral Thesis accepted by
the University of Göttingen, Germany

 Springer

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To my parents and grandparents

Supervisor's Foreword

The spontaneous formation of patterns and structures in systems far from thermal equilibrium belongs to the most fascinating phenomena in nature. Without such processes there would not be any life, leave alone anyone to do science. The bizarre morphologies into which bacterial colonies evolve, the dazzling number of interdependent self-organizing sub-systems (ions, nucleic acids, proteins, organelles) which organize their metabolism, yield just a glance at the immense organizational power of living systems. Yet the overarching principles of such self-organizing, autonomous systems are as yet elusive.

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the underlying physics of self-organization, and possibly to venture out into new areas of application, it would be very desirable to come up with artificial systems which imitate life at the microscopic level. In fact, recent developments in droplet-based microfluidics have paved the way to the preparation of compartmentalized soft-matter systems consisting of similar building blocks as cellular organisms.

The work Shashi Thutupalli is presenting here provides a considerable step forward in this direction. Rafts of droplets of aqueous suspensions are created which are separated from each other only by lipid bilayers. It is shown that the latter can not only be used to incorporate membrane proteins such as ion channels, but also as interesting nonlinear electrical circuitry elements. By introducing oscillating chemical reactions in the droplets, complex coupling patterns can be observed which depend upon the properties of the membranes between adjacent droplets. This provides already a high-level integration of nonlinearity, pattern formation, and biological building blocks.

In a further step, the packing density of the droplets is reduced such that they become freely mobile. A formulation is found which gives rise to locomotion of the droplets, such that their collective behavior can be investigated as another direct consequence of nonequilibrium physics. By a simple rectification experiment, it is demonstrated that the behavior of swarming droplets is fundamentally different from diffusing Brownian particles, although it appears similar to the unexperienced eye. Other striking phenomena like single-file diffusion of active particles can be studied here as well.

In a nutshell, this book provides deep insight into self-assembly and collective phenomena in systems which are extremely versatile and can be well controlled. It is to be expected that it will spur a considerable amount of further research into autonomous soft-matter systems.

Göttingen, May 2013

Prof. Stephan Herminghaus

Acknowledgments

I owe my deepest gratitude to Prof. Stephan Herminghaus for his supervision and guidance during this work. He has provided me with innumerable opportunities, has let me fly with my imagination when I wanted to and has led me by hand when I needed it. I still remember my first meeting with him at the DB Lounge in the Frankfurt train station and it has, since, been a most delightful and significant journey in my life. Stephan's infectious scientific temper, the way he thinks about scientific questions and the wonderfully stimulating atmosphere he creates in the department will remain indelible influences throughout my life. For all the discussions, motivation, for your support and understanding during the hurried thesis writing, for that unforgettable retreat on the sailing boat, and above all, for being a Doktorvater in the truest sense of the word, thank you Stephan!

Prof. Dr. Ralf Seemann has played an invaluable role in my Ph.D. journey. As part of his group I always enjoyed and benefited from the discussions during the group meetings. Together with Prof. Karin Jacobs, he organized winter schools at Feldberg, that were a fun part of my Ph.D. tradition. For your support and guidance, in spite of being in far away Saarbrücken, and in fact at all times, I am very grateful to you Ralf.

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I was very fortunate to be a part of the SFB 755 that was led by Prof. Dr. Tim Salditt. I thank him for his enthusiastic organization and discussion during the winter and autumn schools of the SFB where I learnt a lot of new things and many new scientific questions opened up for me. More importantly, I thank him and Dr. Andre Beerlink for the collaboration on the phase contrast imaging project. Tim and I were the 'day time team' at the ESRF during one intense week of measurements and needless to say I learnt a lot working with him. Matthias Bartels and Michael Mell were the remaining members of that collaboration to whom I am very grateful. It was always interesting to work together with Andre on that project and I wish him very well in his career and look forward to a similar successful collaboration in the future.

I met Dr. Geert van den Bogaart at a 2-day methods course that he organized and those 2 days led to ‘side project’ that lasted many Friday afternoons over 2 years. We did some exciting experiments together, had many great discussions about membrane fusion and life in general and it was always fun! It was a serendipitously wonderful collaboration and has formed a crucial part of my thesis.

I met Dr. Sergio Alonso at the DPG meeting in Regensburg and he ended up doing some beautiful simulations of B–Z droplets. I really look forward to completing that story with him very soon. Sergio was a terrific host to me at Berlin and I look forward to seeing him again soon! Prof. Marcus Hauser has been very encouraging of my work and provided me with a very kind invitation to visit his group at Magdeburg. It was enriching to talk to him about all things BZ and he showed me the delightful world of the plasmodium, where a lot of promise lies. I thank Prof. Holger Stark, Dr. Vasily Zaburdaev, Andreas Zöttl and Max Schmitt, who hosted me in Berlin, and for their inspiring discussions about squirmers. At the very beginning of my thesis, Dr. Jakob Sorensen and Jens Weber at the MPIbpc showed me how to make measurements with a patch clamp amplifier—later, I had many hours of fun, playing with the amplifier!

Monika Teuteberg is a wonderful colleague! Without her help and patience, many things will simply not be possible at the department. My mornings started with her cheery greeting as I walked past her office. It is not the same anymore at the Bunsenstrasse, Monika! Antje Erdmann and Michaela Böttcher have been very kind, efficient and helped me immensely with all the GGNB administration. I thank Udo Krafft and Wolf Keiderling for their technical help during this work. Thomas Eggers, Kris Hantke, and Sibylle Nägle kept the computers and printers and networks running smoothly, with only the finest paper jams.

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My friends Rajiv Iyer, Umakant Rapol, Kunj Tandon, Ayan Bannerjee, and Shankar Chandrasekharan motivated me greatly toward doing a Ph.D. Guys, here it is. Thank you very much!

Simply put, nothing would be possible or even meaningful without my family. My parents, amma and naanna, have been my strength. Their love, care, and prayers have made me what I am and anything I do in my life will always be because of them. My grandparents have been my guiding spirit throughout my life—not a day goes by that I do not think about them fondly. My in-laws, attayya and mamayya, akka, Mintu, Seenu, Lien, and all the kids have supported me with everything and their love is wonderful. And Sravanti. Any amount of words I write for her will fall woefully short of all that I feel. She has been a constant source of succor, love, strength, and pure joy. The Ph.D. work and this thesis would not be possible without her. I think it suffices to say that she complements me in every way imaginable. Sravanti, it's always you and I. Thank you!

Abstract

This book presents experiments on lipid bilayer membranes and nonequilibrium phenomena in active emulsion droplets. In the first part, we outline a concept of self-assembled soft-matter devices based on microfluidics, which use surfactant bilayer membranes as their main building blocks. Membranes form spontaneously when suitable water-in-oil emulsions are forced into microfluidic channels at high-dispersed phase volume fractions and are remarkably stable even when pumped through the microfluidic channel system. Their geometric arrangement is self-assembling, driven by interfacial energy and wetting forces. The ordered membrane arrays thus emerging can be used to build wet electronic circuitry, with the aqueous droplets as the ‘solder points’. Furthermore, the membranes can serve as well-controlled coupling media between chemical processes taking place in adjacent droplets as is shown for the well-known Belousov–Zhabotinsky reaction. We also investigate the dynamics of the fusion of vesicles with bilayer membranes. The particular process that we study is the fusion mediated by the SNARE-proteins embedded in the membranes. It is shown that the electrostatic repulsion between the membranes, due to the charged lipids that comprise them, blocks their fusion. Under such conditions, the conformational change of the membrane protein Synaptotagmin-1, under the influence of Ca^{2+} binding, restores membrane fusion. Thus we show in vitro, for the first time, the massive increase in the membrane fusion due to Ca^{2+} triggering, as is the case in vivo. Further, we present a propagation-based X-ray phase contrast imaging to study structure and interfacial properties of ultrathin model membrane systems.

A scheme of active self-propelled liquid microdroplets which closely mimics the locomotion of some protozoal organisms, so-called squirmers, is presented. In contrast to other schemes proposed earlier, it is demonstrated that locomotion paths of the swimmers are not self-avoiding, since the effect of the squirmer on the surrounding medium is weak. Our results suggest that not only the velocity, but also the mode of operation (i.e., the spherical harmonics of the flow field) can be controlled by appropriate variation of parameters. We have studied experimentally the collective behavior of such self-propelling liquid droplets. We find strong polar correlation of the locomotion velocities of neighboring droplets, which point to the formation of ordered rafts. This shows that pronounced textures, beyond what has been seen in simulations so far, may show up in crowds of simple model

squirmlers, despite the simplicity of their (purely physical) mutual interaction. As such, the self-propelled droplets are not restricted by the classical equilibrium constraints such as the fluctuation dissipation theorem. We build a correlation ratchet, which relies on a broken detailed balance, to demonstrate a passive rectification scheme of a population of the swimmers. Finally, we study the collective dynamics of a population of swimmers when they are confined to a single dimension, in a setting similar to the well-studied single-file diffusion. It is shown that when the short-time dynamics of the swimmer are ballistic, a transition to a diffusive behavior is seen at the long times and when the short-time dynamics are diffusive, the long-time dynamics follow an anomalous diffusion law, as predicted by theory.

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Membranes	3
1.2	Active Matter	6
	References	9
2	Microfluidic Membrane Networks	11
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	Experimental Techniques	14
2.2.1	Patch Clamp Amplifier	14
2.3	Results	15
2.3.1	Formation and Stability of Membranes	17
2.3.2	Electrical Contacts and Characteristics	23
2.4	Summary and Outlook	25
	References	26
3	Electrostatic Interactions in Membrane Fusion	29
3.1	Introduction	29
3.1.1	Current Understanding of the Role of Synaptotagmin-1	31
3.2	Experimental Techniques	33
3.2.1	Microfluidic Assay for Liposome Fusion	34
3.3	Results	37
3.3.1	Electrostatic Repulsion Blocks Membrane Fusion	37
3.3.2	Ca^{2+} -Synaptotagmin-1 Rescues Membrane Fusion	40
3.3.3	Synaptotagmin-1 may be a Distance Regulator	42
3.4	Summary and Outlook	45
	References	46
4	Phase Contrast X-Ray Imaging of Lipid Membranes	49
4.1	Introduction	49
4.2	Experimental Techniques	50
4.2.1	Synchrotron Setup	50
4.2.2	Microfluidic Devices and Membrane Preparation	51
4.3	Results	53
4.3.1	Phase Contrast Imaging Model	53

4.3.2	Divergent Beam Imaging	56
4.3.3	Data Analysis and Fitting	57
4.4	Summary and Outlook	61
	References	62
5	Oscillating Droplets: Chemical Micro-Oscillators	65
5.1	Introduction	65
5.2	Experimental Techniques	66
5.3	Results	68
5.3.1	Isolated BZ Oscillators	68
5.3.2	Membrane Formation Triggers Oscillator Coupling	70
5.3.3	Synchronization Patterns	73
5.4	Summary and Outlook	77
	References	78
6	Swimming Droplets: Artificial Swimmers	79
6.1	Introduction	79
6.2	Experimental Techniques	82
6.3	Results	83
6.3.1	Marangoni Stresses Propel Droplets	83
6.3.2	Hydrodynamic Flow Fields	85
6.3.3	Swimmer Velocity	88
6.4	Summary and Outlook	91
	References	93
7	Interacting Droplets: Collective Dynamics	95
7.1	Introduction	95
7.2	Experimental Techniques	96
7.3	Results	97
7.3.1	Hydrodynamic Interactions of Swimmer Populations	97
7.3.2	Swimmer-Tracer Scattering	101
7.3.3	Swimmers at Walls	103
7.3.4	Swimmers in One-Dimension	108
7.4	Summary and Outlook	113
	References	115
8	Conclusions and Outlook	117
	Appendix A: Materials and Methods	121
	Appendix B: Hydrodynamic Flow Fields with Axial Symmetry	125
	Curriculum Vitae	127

Publications and Meetings

Publications

- (1) *Bilayer membranes in microfluidics: from gel emulsions to soft functional devices*, **S. Thutupalli**, R. Seemann, S. Herminghaus, *Soft Matter*, 2011, 7, 1312–1320.
- (2) *Microfluidic scheme to study lipid bilayers*, J-B. Fleury, **S. Thutupalli**, V. Chokkalingam, and R. Seemann, *Proceedings of the 2nd European Conference on Microfluidics* Toulouse, December 8–10, 2010, μ FLU10-224.
- (3) *Synaptotagmin-1 may be a distance regulator acting upstream of SNARE nucleation*, G v d. Bogaart, **S. Thutupalli**, J. H. Risselada, K. Meyenberg, M. Holt, D. Riedel, U. Diederichsen, S. Herminghaus, H. Grubmüller, R. Jahn, *Nat. Struct. Mol. Biol.*, 18 (7), 805–812
- (4) *Simple model squirmers with tunable velocity*, **S. Thutupalli**, R. Seemann, S. Herminghaus, *arXiv:1103.5425*, 2011
- (5) *Swarming behaviour of simple model squirmers*, **S. Thutupalli**, R. Seemann, S. Herminghaus, *New. J. Phys.*, 13 (7), 073021
- (6) *Nanoscale Phase Contrast Imaging of Lipid Bilayer Membranes using Hard X-Rays*, A. Beerlink, **S. Thutupalli**, S. Herminghaus, T. Salditt, *Soft Matter* 8 (17), 4595–4601
- (7) *Why can artificial membranes be fabricated so rapidly in microfluidics?* **S. Thutupalli**, J-B. Fleury, A. Steinberger, R. Seemann, S. Herminghaus, *Chem. Comm.* 49 (14), 1443–1445

Invited Seminars

- 2011** Seminar über Nichtlinearität und Unordnung in komplexen Systemen, University of Magdeburg
- 2010** Cell Biology and Biophysics Unit, European Molecular Biology Laboratory, Heidelberg

2010 Institute for Theoretical Physics, Technical University, Berlin

2010 Center for Models of Life, Neils Bohr Institute, Copenhagen

Selected Meetings

2011 *APS March Meeting*, Dallas, USA (Talk)

2011 *DPG Spring Meeting*, Dresden (Talk, Poster)

2010 *Nonlinear Dynamics Meeting*, Bayreuth (Poster—Best poster award)

2010 *GRC on Oscillations and Dynamical Instabilities in Chemical Systems*, Italy (Poster)

2010 *DPG Spring Meeting*, Regensburg (Talks)

2009 *European Conference on Molecular Electronics*, Copenhagen, Denmark (Poster)

2009 *DPG Spring Meeting*, Dresden (Talk, Poster)

2008 *DPG Spring Meeting*, Berlin (Poster)