



water

Turbulence in River and Maritime Hydraulics

Edited by
Michele Mossa, Donatella Termini and Peter A. Davies
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About the Special Issue Editors

Michele Mossa is Professor of Hydraulics at the Polytechnic University of Bari (Italy). He is chief scientist of the Coastal Engineering Laboratory—LIC and a member of the board of directors of the National Consortium of Universities for Marine Sciences (CoNISMa) for the Polytechnic University of Bari. The main topics of his research are related to environmental and maritime hydraulics.

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Preface to “Description of the Cover Image”



Starry Night, Vincent van Gogh, 1889 Oil on canvas, 73 × 92 cm, 28¾ × 36¼ in Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Art experts have long marvelled at the emotional chaos apparent in the later paintings of the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh. Perhaps that is because the images reflect light in a way that mimics the physics of turbulence. At least that is the view of a team of physicists led by Jose Luis Aragon of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, who analysed several of VanGogh’s later paintings, including *Starry Night*, *Road with Cypress* and *Star and Wheat Field with Crows*. Mathematically, they studied how the luminosity, which is a measure of the total amount of visible light reflected off the paintings, varied across the canvas. Specifically, they analysed the likelihood that two points a distance D apart would have the same, or similar, brightness. In each of the paintings, they found that points further apart were statistically less likely to have similar luminosities. This in itself is not surprising. But this probability decreased in a very simple way, in proportion to the distance between the points, D , raised to some power. This pattern is significant. The very same pattern characterizes variations in fluid velocity at different points in a churning, turbulent liquid, a property called Kolmogorov scaling, after the Russian physicist Andrei Kolmogorov. “Some art critics, have said that Van Gogh’s paintings give the impression of looking through a turbulent atmosphere,” says team member Gerardo Naumis. “But we were very, very surprised by the close link to Kolmogorov’s theory.”

Also surprising is the difference between Van Gogh’s later and earlier work. The pattern of luminosity in the paintings Van Gogh created during periods of emotional calm bears little resemblance to real-world turbulence. A strong visual sense of turbulence, apparent also in the mathematical analysis, appeared only in paintings created during times when he was psychologically disturbed. Van Gogh painted his famous *Starry Night*, for example, during a year spent in an asylum. In contrast, he completed his *Self-Portrait with Pipe and Bandaged Ear*

in a state of self-described “absolute calm”. Mathematically, this work lacks the signature of turbulence. Naumis speculates that there could be some link between fluid turbulence and the dynamics of neural processes in disturbed individuals, and that mathematics might provide a means for detecting psychic disturbance through the analysis of drawings. “The work so far is only a first step,” he says. “We need to apply it to patients and see if it works”.

(By Mark Buchanan, New Scientist, 15 July 2006)

Preface to "Turbulence in River and Maritime Hydraulics"

Understanding of the role of turbulence in controlling transport processes is of paramount importance for the preservation and protection of aquatic ecosystems, the minimization of the deleterious consequences of anthropogenic activity, and the successful sustainable development of river and maritime areas. In this context, the present Special Issue collects 15 papers which provide a representation of the present understanding of turbulent processes and their effects in river and maritime environments. The presented collection of papers is not exhaustive, but it highlights the key priority areas and knowledge gaps in this field of research.

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