

1/f Noise in a Coulomb Glass and in a Noninteracting Electron Glass

Kirill Shtengel^{a,b} and Clare C. Yu^a

^a Department of Physics and Astronomy,
University of California Irvine, Irvine, CA 92697-4575

^b Microsoft, Redmond, WA 98052

ABSTRACT

We show that $1/f$ noise is produced in a 3D electron glass by charge fluctuations due to electrons hopping between isolated sites and a percolating network at low temperatures. The low frequency noise spectrum goes as $\omega^{-\alpha}$ with α slightly larger than 1. This result together with the temperature dependence of α and the noise amplitude are in good agreement with the recent experiments. These results hold true both for a noninteracting electron glass with a flat density of states and for a Coulomb glass. In the latter case, the density of states has a Coulomb gap that fills in with increasing temperature. For a large Coulomb gap width, this density of states gives a dc conductivity with a hopping exponent of ≈ 0.75 which has been observed in recent experiments. For a small Coulomb gap width, the hopping exponent ≈ 0.5 . At low temperatures the noise amplitude of a noninteracting electron glass increases linearly with temperature while the noise amplitude of a Coulomb glass increases quadratically.

Keywords: Electron glass, Coulomb glass, $1/f$ noise, electron hopping, disorder

1. INTRODUCTION

Low frequency $1/f$ noise¹⁻³ is found in a wide variety of conducting systems such as metals, semiconductors, tunnel junctions,⁴ and even superconducting SQUIDs.^{5,6} Yet the microscopic mechanisms are still not well understood. One example is an electron glass which is an insulator where electrons are localized by a strong random potential. A special case of this is a Coulomb glass in which the electrons interact with one another via a long range Coulomb potential. Doped semiconductors and strongly disordered metals provide examples of electron glasses. Experimental studies on doped silicon inversion layers have shown that low frequency $1/f$ noise is produced by hopping conduction.⁷ Because the systems are glassy, electron hopping can occur on very long time scales which can produce low frequency noise. In this paper we show that the resulting noise spectrum goes as $f^{-\alpha}$ where f is frequency and the temperature dependent exponent $\alpha > 1$.

Shklovskii has suggested that $1/f$ noise is caused by fluctuations in the number of electrons in an infinite percolating cluster.⁸ These fluctuations are caused by the slow exchange of electrons between the infinite conducting cluster and small isolated donor clusters. Subsequently Kogan and Shklovskii combined a more rigorous calculation with numerical simulations and found a noise spectrum where α was considerably lower than 1.⁹ Furthermore, below a minimum frequency of order 1–100 Hz, the noise spectral density saturated and became a constant independent of frequency. Their calculations were valid only in the high temperature regime where the impurity band was assumed to be occupied uniformly and long-range Coulomb correlations were essentially neglected. Since then there have been attempts to include the effects of correlations.

In particular, Kozub suggested a model¹⁰ in which electron hops within isolated pairs of impurities produce fluctuations in the potential seen by other hopping electrons that contribute to the current. While leading to $1/f$ -type noise within some frequency range, this model also shows low frequency noise saturation due to the exponentially small probability of finding an *isolated* pair of sites with a long tunneling time. Moreover, the noise magnitude is predicted to increase as the temperature $T \rightarrow 0$ in contradiction with the recent experimental findings of Massey and Lee.¹¹ This, in part, led Massey and Lee to conclude that the single particle picture

e-mail: shtengel@microsoft.com, cyu@uci.edu

is inconsistent with the observed noise behavior. Later work by Shklovskii¹² also found the noise increasing with decreasing temperature in agreement with some experiments¹³ but not with the experiments of Massey and Lee.¹¹ A different approach was proposed by Kogan¹⁴ who considered intervalley transitions as the source of the hopping conduction noise. Unfortunately this approach does not seem to be analytically tractable and is not easily generalizable.

In this paper we extend Kogan and Shklovskii's approach⁹ by including the energy dependence of the hopping as well as the effects of electron–electron interactions on the single particle density of states $g(\varepsilon)$. This is essentially a mean field approximation: we assume that charge is carried by electron-like quasiparticles whose interaction with the other charges is taken into account via the single particle density of states. Later we will present some justification for why we believe this approach works for low frequency noise. For comparison we also consider the case of noninteracting electrons with a flat density of states.

The paper is organized as follows. In section IIa, we describe our calculation of the noise spectral density. In section IIb, we present the density of states that includes the Coulomb gap and that models the decrease in the gap with increasing temperature. We show that this form of the density of states yields the usual value of the hopping exponent $\delta \approx 0.5$ for small values of the Coulomb gap width E_g . However, for large values of E_g , $\delta \approx 0.75$. Both values have been seen experimentally.^{11,15–19} In section III, we present our results. Some of these results and further details about our calculation can be found in another paper.²⁰

2. CALCULATION

2.1. Noise Spectral Density

We start with a model of the Coulomb glass in which electrons occupy half of the impurity sites. Each site can have at most 1 electron due to a large onsite repulsion. The sites are randomly placed according to a uniform spatial distribution, and each has a random onsite energy ϕ_i chosen from a uniform distribution extending from $-W/2$ to $W/2$. Thus, g_0 , the density of states without interactions, is flat. At $T = 0$ such a system is a perfect insulator while at low but finite temperatures it will be able to conduct via variable range hopping.^{21–23} In this picture the DC conductivity is dominated by particles hopping along the percolating network, which is constructed as follows. The resistance R_{ij} associated with a transition between sites i and j grows exponentially with both their separation r_{ij} and energy difference ε_{ij} :

$$R_{ij} = R_{ij}^0 \exp(x_{ij}) \quad (1)$$

where the prefactor $R_{ij}^0 = kT/(e^2\gamma_{ij}^0)$ with γ_{ij}^0 being given by²³

$$\gamma_{ij}^0 = \frac{D^2 |\Delta_i^j|}{\pi \rho s^5 \hbar^4} \left[\frac{2e^2}{3\kappa\xi} \right]^2 \frac{r_{ij}^2}{\xi^2} \left[1 + \left(\frac{\Delta_i^j \xi}{2\hbar s} \right)^2 \right]^{-4} \quad (2)$$

where D is the deformation potential, s is the speed of sound, ρ is the mass density, ξ is the localization length and κ is the dielectric constant. $\Delta_i^j = \varepsilon_j - \varepsilon_i - e^2/\kappa r_{ij}$ is the change in energy that results from hopping from i to j with $\varepsilon_i = \phi_i + \sum_j \frac{e^2}{\kappa r_{ij}} n_j$ being a single site energy. In Eq. (1), the exponent is given by

$$x_{ij} = \frac{2r_{ij}}{\xi} + \frac{\varepsilon_{ij}}{kT} \quad (3)$$

The exponent reflects the thermally activated hopping rate between i and j as well as the wavefunction overlap between the sites.

$$\varepsilon_{ij} = \begin{cases} |\varepsilon_j - \varepsilon_i| - \frac{e^2}{\kappa r_{ij}}, & (\varepsilon_i - \mu)(\varepsilon_j - \mu) < 0 \\ \max[|\varepsilon_i - \mu|, |\varepsilon_j - \mu|], & (\varepsilon_i - \mu)(\varepsilon_j - \mu) > 0 \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

(In what follows we choose the Fermi level $\mu = 0$.)

A noninteracting picture of DC conduction is described in terms of electron hopping between sites in a cluster that spans the entire sample. In order to determine which sites are in a cluster, we introduce the “acceptance”

parameter x such that any two sites i and j are considered “connected” if $x_{ij} \leq x$ and disconnected otherwise. For small values of x only rare pairs of sites are connected. As we increase x , more such pairs appear and small clusters start coalescing into bigger ones until an infinite cluster – the critical percolating network – is formed at some x_c . At this point we can neglect the contribution of the remaining impurity sites to the DC conductivity since it is exponentially small compared to that of the sites already in the percolating network (although the former sites are important for understanding both AC conductivity and noise). In the same spirit, the resistance of the critical percolating network is dominated by a few pairs with $x_{ij} = x_c$ – these are the pairs that bridge the gaps between large finite clusters enabling the formation of the infinite cluster. Hence, the resistance of the entire sample is well approximated by $R_{tot} \approx \overline{R^0} \exp(x_c)$ where $\overline{R^0} \equiv kT/(e^2 \overline{\gamma^0})$ with $\overline{\gamma^0}$ being the average value of γ_{ij}^0 given by Eq. (2).

In the presence of Coulomb interactions, there is no exact mapping of transport onto a percolation picture. We nevertheless assume that upon diagonalizing the interacting Hamiltonian one finds that charge carrying excitations are of a local nature, and so they can be treated within the percolation picture as noninteracting quasiparticles. The Coulomb interactions renormalize the single-particle density of states which acquires a soft gap. We will discuss this in more detail in the section on the density of states. However, we will mention here that this approach appears to work well for DC conduction and leads to a temperature dependence of the conductivity^{23–25} which is distinctly different from the noninteracting case and which agrees with experiment (see for example the work of Massey and Lee.^{26–30} However, the question about the validity of this approach is still far from being settled – see Perez–Garrido *et al.*³¹ for a different point of view.

In our treatment we will focus on the noise caused by quasiparticle hopping between isolated clusters and the percolating network, producing fluctuations of charge in the latter.^{8,9} Let $N_{\mathcal{P}}$ be the average number of such particles in the critical percolating network and $\delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t)$ be its time-dependent fluctuation. Assuming that only stationary processes are involved (i.e. $\langle \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_2) \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_1) \rangle = f(t_2 - t_1)$), we can use the Wiener–Khinchine theorem³ to relate the noise spectral density $S_I(\omega)$ of current fluctuations to the Fourier transform of the autocorrelation function:

$$\frac{S_I(\omega)}{I^2} = \frac{2 \langle \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_2) \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_1) \rangle_{\omega}}{N_{\mathcal{P}}^2} \quad (5)$$

where I is the average current. The charge fluctuation autocorrelation function can be expressed as a superposition of modes α , each of which relax exponentially with a characteristic time τ_{α} . Thus the Fourier transform $\langle \dots \rangle_{\omega}$ of the autocorrelation function is a weighted sum over Lorentzians.⁹

$$\langle \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_2) \delta N_{\mathcal{P}}(t_1) \rangle_{\omega} = \frac{2kT}{e^2} \sum_{\alpha \neq 0} \frac{\tau_{\alpha}}{1 + \omega^2 \tau_{\alpha}^2} \left| \sum_{i \in \mathcal{P}} C_i \psi_{\alpha}(i) \right|^2 \quad (6)$$

Here $C_i \equiv (e^2/kT) f_i(1 - f_i)$ is the “capacitance” of site i (with $f_i = [\exp(\varepsilon_i/kT) + 1]^{-1}$ being its equilibrium occupancy) while τ_{α}^{-1} and $\psi_{\alpha}(i)$ are the α -th eigenvalue and eigenvector of the following system of linear equations:

$$\sum_j R_{ij}^{-1} [\psi_{\alpha}(i) - \psi_{\alpha}(j)] = \tau_{\alpha}^{-1} C_i \psi_{\alpha}(j) \quad (7)$$

with R_{ij} being the inter-site resistances given by Eq. (1). Since R_{ij}^{-1} is proportional to the hopping rate $\tau_{ij}^{-1} = \gamma_{ij}^0 \exp(-x_{ij})$ from site i to site j , eq. (7) relates τ_{α}^{-1} to the relaxation rates τ_{α}^{-1} of the entire percolating network. The sum over sites i in Eq. (6) runs only over those sites that belong to the critical percolating network (CN) since only their occupancies affect the current through the sample. The physical meaning of the quantity $C_i \psi_{\alpha}(i)$ is that it is proportional to the fluctuation δf_i of the occupation of site i and decays exponentially with the associated time constant τ_{α} . The eigenvectors satisfy the following conditions:

$$\sum_i C_i \psi_{\alpha}(i) \psi_{\beta}^*(i) = \delta_{\alpha\beta} \quad (8)$$

$$\sum_{\alpha} C_i \psi_{\alpha}(i) \psi_{\alpha}^*(j) = \delta_{ij} \quad (9)$$

$$\sum_i C_i \psi_{\alpha}(i) = 0 \quad \forall \alpha \neq 0 \quad (10)$$

The first condition states that the eigenfunctions are orthonormal; the second states that the functions form a complete set. One of the eigenfunctions is a constant which we take to be the one corresponding to $\alpha = 0$. This has the eigenvalue $\tau_0^{-1} = 0$. Eq. (10) is the orthonormalization condition between this eigenstate and the others. It represents the fact that the fluctuations in occupation represented by the $\alpha \neq 0$ modes do not affect the total number of electrons on the impurity sites. Thus the last equation is just the statement of overall charge conservation. We remark here that Eqs. (7) are *linear* only within the assumption made earlier of noninteracting quasiparticles. Otherwise the R_{ij} are *not* constant coefficients; they depend on the onsite energies, which in turn depend on the occupancies of other sites.

In evaluating Eq. (6), we make the following approximation for τ_α . Since we are interested in the modes α that affect the charge of the percolating network, we only consider particle exchange between the isolated clusters and the infinite cluster. This involves hopping times that are longer than those within the percolating network itself by definition. Due to the exponentially wide distribution of hopping times τ_{ij} such exchange is likely to be dominated by the single closest pair of sites of which one belongs to the finite, and the other to the infinite cluster. The relaxation times within each cluster are much faster, and therefore the above mentioned pair serves as a “bottleneck” for intercluster relaxation. A simple diagonalization of the system of equations (7) for two clusters \mathcal{A}_1 and \mathcal{A}_2 , with the “bottleneck” hopping resistance $R = \min(R_{ij}; i \in \mathcal{A}_1, j \in \mathcal{A}_2)$ between them (and with the assumption that all other intercluster resistances are much higher and all intracuster resistances are much lower than R) leads to the following expression for the intercluster relaxation time:

$$\tau = R \left(\left[\sum_{i \in \mathcal{A}_1} C_i \right]^{-1} + \left[\sum_{j \in \mathcal{A}_2} C_j \right]^{-1} \right)^{-1}. \quad (11)$$

Since we are interested only in the situation when one of the clusters is infinite, this simplifies Eq. (11): $\tau = R \sum_{i \in \mathcal{A}} C_i$, where \mathcal{A} is the finite cluster.

We can substitute this value of τ into Eq. (6) by replacing the sum over all modes α by a sum over all finite clusters that coalesce with the infinite cluster as the acceptance parameter x is increased above x_c . Each such finite cluster contributes one new term to the sum over α in Eq. (6) with the corresponding $\tau_\alpha = R(x) \sum_{i \in \mathcal{A}} C_i$ where $R(x) = \overline{R^0} e^x$. Then we can write the spectral density of the noise as follows:²⁰

$$\frac{S_I(\omega)}{I^2} = \frac{16kT}{e^2} \int_{\lambda x_c}^{\infty} dx \sum'_{\mathcal{A}} \frac{N_{IC}^{-2}(x) R(x) \left(\sum_{i \in \mathcal{A}} C_i \right)^2}{1 + \omega^2 R^2(x) \left(\sum_{i \in \mathcal{A}} C_i \right)^2} \quad (12)$$

where $\sum'_{\mathcal{A}}$ stands for the sum over all finite clusters that coalesce with the infinite cluster as x increases by dx . The parameter $\lambda \geq 1$ and sets the distance in x space from the percolation threshold.

This equation is difficult to evaluate mathematically. Fortunately, however, we can extract the low frequency asymptotic behavior of Eq. (12) where the above approximations are well justified. The lowest frequency contributions come from large values of x where the infinite cluster has already absorbed almost all the sites (i.e. $N_{IC} \approx N$, the total number of sites). What is left are the small clusters, which are mostly isolated sites in the increasingly rare voids of the infinite cluster. The probability of having two such sites in the same void is negligibly small. Since low frequency noise will be dominated by the hops between such isolated sites and the infinite cluster, we only consider such hops in obtaining the spectral density of current fluctuations. In Eq. (12) we can set λ to correspond to this situation at large x , and we can replace the sum over all finite clusters that are merging with the infinite cluster with a sum over all sites multiplied by the probability density $(-\partial P_1(x, \varepsilon)/\partial x)$ that a single site with energy ε has its nearest neighbor between x and $x + dx$. We can now write the spectral density of current fluctuations as

$$\frac{S_I(\omega)}{I^2} = \frac{16kTV}{e^2 N^2} \int_{\lambda x_c}^{\infty} dx \int_{-W/2}^{W/2} d\varepsilon g(\varepsilon, T) \left(-\frac{\partial P_1(x, \varepsilon)}{\partial x} \right) \frac{R(x) C^2(\varepsilon)}{1 + \omega^2 R^2(x) C^2(\varepsilon)} \quad (13)$$

where V is the volume, W is the bandwidth, and $f(\varepsilon)$ is the Fermi occupation number. The probability $P_1(x, \varepsilon)$ that a given site with the onsite energy ε has no neighbors nearer than x is given by

$$P_1(x, \varepsilon) = \exp \left\{ - \int d^d r \int_{-W/2}^{W/2} d\varepsilon' g(\varepsilon', T) \theta \left(x - \frac{2r}{\xi} - \frac{|\varepsilon| + |\varepsilon'| + |\varepsilon - \varepsilon'|}{2kT} \right) \right\}. \quad (14)$$

Notice the absence of the Coulomb energy in the argument of the θ -function in Eq. (14), in accordance with our quasiparticle picture. Our quasiparticle picture is likely to work best for hops between isolated sites and the infinite cluster. Although one such hop may result in a sequence of other hops, these will mostly happen within the infinite cluster on a much shorter time-scale, effectively renormalizing the properties of the “slow” particle. As was mentioned earlier, these renormalizations can be included in the single particle density of states $g(\varepsilon, T)$.

To facilitate evaluating the integral in Eq. (13) numerically for the case where we include a Coulomb gap in the density of states, we define the dimensionless variables $\tilde{r} = r/\xi$, $\tilde{\varepsilon} = \varepsilon/E_g$, $\tilde{\omega} = \omega/\bar{\gamma}^\sigma$, $\tilde{T} = kT/E_g$, $\tilde{\tau} = \bar{\gamma}^\sigma R(x)C(\varepsilon) = f(\varepsilon)(1 - f(\varepsilon))e^x$, and $\tilde{g}(\tilde{\varepsilon}, \tilde{T}) = g(\varepsilon, T)/g_o$. g_o is the noninteracting density of states and $E_g \approx e^3 \sqrt{\pi g_o/3\kappa^3}$ is the characteristic width of the Coulomb gap. Evaluating the integral over x in Eq. (13) leads us to define

$$\tilde{x} = 2\tilde{r} + \frac{|\tilde{\varepsilon}| + |\tilde{\varepsilon}'| + |\tilde{\varepsilon} - \tilde{\varepsilon}'|}{2\tilde{T}} \quad (15)$$

Then we can rewrite Eq. (13) as

$$\frac{S_I(\omega)}{I^2} = A \int_{-\tilde{W}/2}^{\tilde{W}/2} d\tilde{\varepsilon} \tilde{g}(\tilde{\varepsilon}, \tilde{T}) \int_{-\tilde{W}/2}^{\tilde{W}/2} d\tilde{\varepsilon}' \tilde{g}(\tilde{\varepsilon}', \tilde{T}) \int_0^{\tilde{R}_V} \tilde{r}^2 d\tilde{r} \theta(\tilde{x} - \lambda x_c) \frac{P_1(\tilde{x}, \tilde{\varepsilon}) \tilde{\tau}(\tilde{x}, \tilde{\varepsilon}) f(\tilde{\varepsilon}) [1 - f(\tilde{\varepsilon})]}{1 + \tilde{\omega}^2 \tilde{\tau}^2(\tilde{x}, \tilde{\varepsilon})} \quad (16)$$

where $A = 64\pi g_o^2 E_g^2 V \xi^3 / (N^2 \bar{\gamma}^\sigma)$, $\tilde{R}_V = (3V/4\pi)^{1/3} / \xi$, $\tilde{W} = W/E_g$, $\eta = 4\pi g_o E_g \xi^3$, and

$$P_1(\tilde{x}, \tilde{\varepsilon}) = \exp \left[-\eta \int_0^{\tilde{R}_V} \tilde{r}'^2 d\tilde{r}' \int_{-\tilde{W}/2}^{\tilde{W}/2} d\tilde{\varepsilon}'' \tilde{g}(\tilde{\varepsilon}'', \tilde{T}) \theta \left(\tilde{x} - 2\tilde{r}' - \frac{|\tilde{\varepsilon}| + |\tilde{\varepsilon}''| + |\tilde{\varepsilon} - \tilde{\varepsilon}''|}{2\tilde{T}} \right) \right] \quad (17)$$

For comparison we also consider the case with no Coulomb gap by setting $g(\varepsilon, T) = g_o$ in Eqs. (13) and (14). Since there is no natural energy scale, we do not rescale the energies. However, we can define \tilde{r} , $\tilde{\tau}$, and $\tilde{\omega}$ as before. As a result, the definition of \tilde{x} in Eq. (15) becomes $\tilde{x} = 2\tilde{r} + (|\varepsilon| + |\varepsilon'| + |\varepsilon - \varepsilon'|) / (2T)$. In Eq. (16), A is replaced by $A_o = 64\pi V g_o^2 \xi^3 / N^2 \bar{\gamma}^\sigma$ and \tilde{W} is replaced by simply W . In Eq. (17) η is replaced by $\eta_o = 4\pi \xi^3 g_o$.

2.2. Density of States

At zero temperature, long-range interactions produce a Coulomb gap centered at the Fermi energy in the density of states.^{23, 24, 32, 33} This gap arises because the stability of the ground state with respect to single electron hopping from an occupied site i to an unoccupied site j requires that the energy difference $\Delta_i^j > 0$. At finite temperatures the Coulomb gap is partially filled and the density of states no longer vanishes at the Fermi energy.³⁴⁻³⁹ The exact form of $g(\varepsilon, T)$ is not known, but some have argued³⁷⁻³⁹ that its low temperature asymptotic behavior is described by $g(\varepsilon = 0, T) \sim T^{d-1}$. We have done Monte Carlo simulations of a three dimensional Coulomb glass with off-diagonal disorder and we find that $g(\varepsilon = 0, T)$ cannot be described by a simple power law.^{35, 40} The results of such simulations do not produce a density of states that is suitable for use in our noise integrals due to finite size effects. In particular $g(\varepsilon, T)$ goes to zero at energies far away from the Fermi energy because of the finite size of the system. Another way to approximate the density of states is to use the Bethe–Peierls–Weiss (BPW) approximation.³⁸ The idea is to treat the interactions between one “central” site and all other sites (boundary sites) exactly, but to include the interactions between these boundary sites by means of effective fields. The density of states can then be written as a convolution

$$g(\varepsilon, T) = \int_{-W_o/2}^{W_o/2} d\varepsilon' g(\varepsilon - \varepsilon') \frac{1}{kT} h \left(\frac{\varepsilon'}{kT} \right) \quad (18)$$

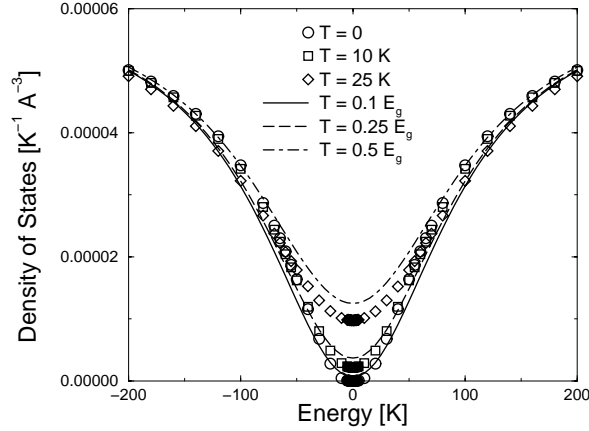


Figure 1. The density of states $g(\varepsilon, T)$ versus ε at various temperatures. The symbols are calculated using Eq. (18) with $W_o/2 = 2.3 \times 10^4$ K. The density of states is measured from the Fermi energy $E_F = 0$. The lines are the result of evaluating Eq. (19) with $E_g = 100$ K. $g_o = 6.25 \times 10^{-5}$ states/KÅ³.

where $g(\varepsilon)$ is the zero temperature density of states and W_o is the bandwidth. The function $h(\varepsilon/kT)$ takes into account thermal fluctuations in the occupation of the central site and the boundary sites. At low temperatures it has a sharp peak with a width of the order kT centered at $\varepsilon = 0$. We can make the approximation $(1/kT)h(\varepsilon/kT) \approx -f'(\varepsilon)$ where $f'(\varepsilon)$ is the derivative of the Fermi function. The zero temperature density of states can be determined numerically by solving a self-consistent equation based on the ground state stability condition that a single electron hopping from an occupied site i to an unoccupied site j requires $\Delta_i^j > 0$.^{41, 42} The result of evaluating Eq. (18) is shown in Fig. 1.

Since using the BPW approximation to evaluate Eqs. (13) and (14) is rather awkward, we model phenomenologically the finite temperature density of states by

$$g(\varepsilon, T) = g_o \frac{\varepsilon^2 + (kT)^2}{E_g^2 + \varepsilon^2 + (kT)^2}. \quad (19)$$

Notice that for $T = 0$, $g(\varepsilon, T = 0) \sim \varepsilon^2$ for $\varepsilon \ll E_g$ as is expected for a Coulomb gap in three dimensions.^{24, 33} For large energies ($\varepsilon \gg E_g$ and $\varepsilon \gg kT$), $g(\varepsilon, T)$ approaches the noninteracting value g_o . A comparison of Eq. (19) with the BPW approximation at various temperatures is shown in Fig. 1. Eq. (19) is the expression we use for the density of states of a Coulomb glass in Eqs. (13) and (14).

We can calculate the DC conductivity resulting from this density of states by following Mott's argument for variable range hopping.²³ We start with the hopping resistance R_{ij} given by Eq. (1). Mott pointed out that hopping conduction at low temperatures comes from states near the Fermi energy. If we consider states within ε_o of the Fermi energy ($E_F = 0$), then the concentration of states in this band is

$$N(\varepsilon_o, T) = \int_{-\varepsilon_o}^{\varepsilon_o} g(\varepsilon, T) d\varepsilon \quad (20)$$

where $g(\varepsilon, T)$ is given by Eq. (19). So the typical separation between sites is $R_o = [N(\varepsilon_o, T)]^{-1/3}$. To estimate the resistance corresponding to hopping between two typical states in the band, we replace r_{ij} with R_o and ε_{ij} with ε_o in Eq. (3) to obtain $x(\varepsilon_o)$. Minimizing $x(\varepsilon_o)$ numerically yields ε_o . The dc conductivity is then given by $\sigma(T) = \sigma_o \exp[-x(\varepsilon_o)]$. We find that at low temperatures ($T \ll E_g$)

$$\sigma(T) = \sigma_o \exp \left[- \left(\frac{T_o}{T} \right)^\delta \right] \quad (21)$$

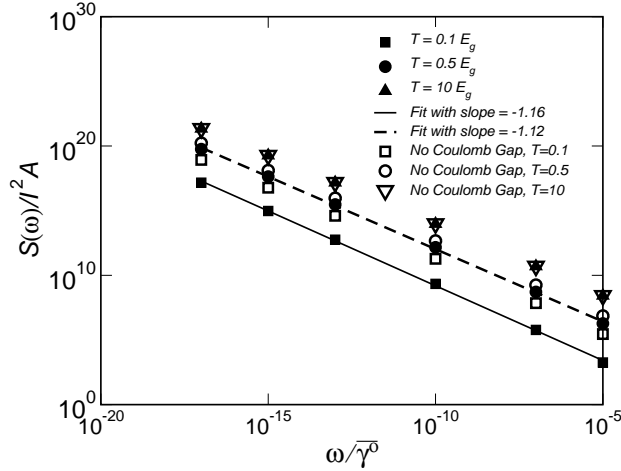


Figure 2. The noise power spectrum as a function of frequency. The frequency is measured in the units of $\overline{\gamma}^\delta$ which is estimated to be of the order 10^{13} Hz for values appropriate for insulating Si:B. Unless otherwise noted, all curves in this and the following figures which were obtained for the case with a Coulomb gap used $\eta = 4\pi E_g \xi^3 g_o \sim 12[E_g/(e^2/\kappa\xi)]^3 = 4.8 \times 10^{-6}$, which in our estimates corresponds to the experimental dopant concentration of roughly $n = 0.8 n_c$ for Si:B.^{11, 26–30} We set $\tilde{W} = 20$, $\tilde{R}_V = 100$ and $\lambda x_c = 1$ (the precise value of λ has no effect on the low frequency noise which is governed by $x \gg x_c$). The parameter $A \equiv 64\pi V E_g^2 g_o^2 \xi^3 / N^2 \overline{\gamma}^\delta$. For comparison we show the noise spectrum in the absence of a Coulomb gap with $g(\varepsilon, T) = g_o$ in Eqs. (13) and (14). In the absence of a Coulomb gap, A is replaced by $A_o \equiv 64\pi V g_o^2 \xi^3 / N^2 \overline{\gamma}^\delta$ and η is replaced by $\eta_o = 4\pi \xi^3 g_o = 4.8 \times 10^{-6}$. The energy is measured in arbitrary units and we set $W = 20$. The other variables are the same as in the case of a finite Coulomb gap.

where δ is the hopping exponent. The value of δ depends on E_g . For large values of the Coulomb gap ($E_g \gtrsim 50$ K) $\delta \approx 0.75$ while for small values of the Coulomb gap ($E_g \lesssim 1$ K) $\delta \approx 0.5$. When we tried intermediate values of $E_g = 8, 10, \text{ and } 20$ K, we found that $\ln[x(\varepsilon_o)]$ versus $\ln(T)$ had a break in slope with $\delta \approx 0.5$ at low temperatures and with $\delta \approx 0.72 - 0.75$ at high temperatures. $\delta = 0.75$ is higher than the Mott value of $\delta = 0.25$ associated with a flat density of states and the value of $\delta = 0.5$ derived by Efros and Shklovskii²⁴ for the zero temperature Coulomb gap. However, experiments on materials such as ultrathin metal films find values for $\delta = 0.75 \pm 0.05$ ^{15–19} in agreement with our value of δ for large E_g . The mechanism behind this exponent has been a puzzle.^{15, 43} Here we see that a possible simple explanation for the experimental observation of an anomalous hopping exponent is that the Coulomb gap in the single particle density of states is filling in with increasing temperature. If one takes this into account in the variable range hopping calculations, then the observed exponent of 0.75 can be obtained naturally. However, we should caution that our calculation applies to three dimensions while a two dimensional calculation may be more appropriate for ultrathin films. In fact we find that the analogous two dimensional calculation with a density of states $g(\varepsilon, T) = g_o (|\varepsilon| + kT) / (E_g + |\varepsilon| + kT)$ yields $\delta \approx 0.5$.

3. RESULTS

We evaluate Eqs. (16) and (17) numerically and display the results in Figs. 2–5. In Fig. 2 we show the spectral density of the noise as a function of frequency. We find that for a wide range of parameters the noise spectral density is given by $S(\omega) \sim \omega^{-\alpha}$ with the spectral exponent α between 1.07 and 1.16 (see Figs. 2, 4) which is “1/f” noise. For comparison we show in Fig. 2 the noise spectrum in the absence of a Coulomb gap with $g(\varepsilon, T) = g_o$ in Eqs. (13) and (14). The slope of a line (not shown) through the open squares is -1.12 which is very close to the values obtained with a Coulomb gap. Notice that the presence of a Coulomb gap reduces the noise amplitude at low temperatures.

In Fig. 2 we use the *transport* value of $E_g \approx 0.4K$, not the tunneling one $\sim 8K$; the two were found to be different by an order of magnitude.^{25–30} We find that increasing E_g by a factor of 20 does not produce a noticeable change of the results at low temperatures ($T = 0.1 E_g$), but at high temperatures ($T = 10 E_g$) it

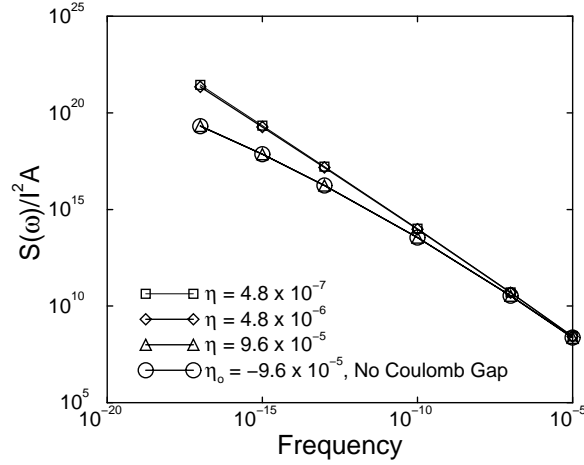


Figure 3. The noise power spectrum as a function of frequency at $T = 10 E_g$ for various values of $\eta = 4\pi E_g \xi^3 g_o$. The rest of the parameters are the same as in Fig. 2. Notice the saturation at low frequencies for large η . For comparison we show the case with no Coulomb gap at $T = 10$ with a large value of $\eta_o = 4\pi \xi^3 g_o$. Large values of η_o lead to saturation but small values do not.

does lead to saturation of the noise power at low frequencies. This is shown in Figure 3 which also shows that saturation occurs in the absence of a Coulomb gap when η_o is increased by a factor of 20. This saturation of the noise power occurs because the probability $P_1(x, \varepsilon)$ of finding a site with no neighbors closer than x (see Eq. (14)) decreases exponentially with increasing temperature and with increasing η or η_o . In addition $P_1(x, \varepsilon)$ becomes exponentially small as x becomes large, and it is the large values of x that contribute to the low frequency noise. Finally we note that decreasing E_g by a factor of 10 does not produce a noticeable change of the results for either low temperatures ($T = 0.1 E_g$) or high temperatures ($T = 10 E_g$).

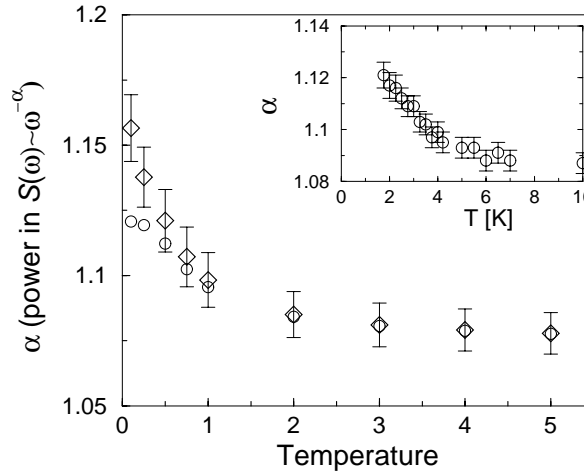


Figure 4. The spectral exponent α as a function of temperature with a Coulomb gap in the density of states (\diamond) and with a flat density of states (\circ). We have suppressed the error bars for the case with no Coulomb gap to avoid cluttering the graph. The suppressed error bars are comparable to those for the exponent with a Coulomb gap at high temperatures. The temperature is measured in units of the Coulomb gap E_g for the case where there is a Coulomb gap, and in arbitrary units for the case without a Coulomb gap. The inset shows the experimental data obtained for Si:B.¹¹

We plot the spectral exponent α in Fig. 4 versus temperature for the cases with and without a Coulomb

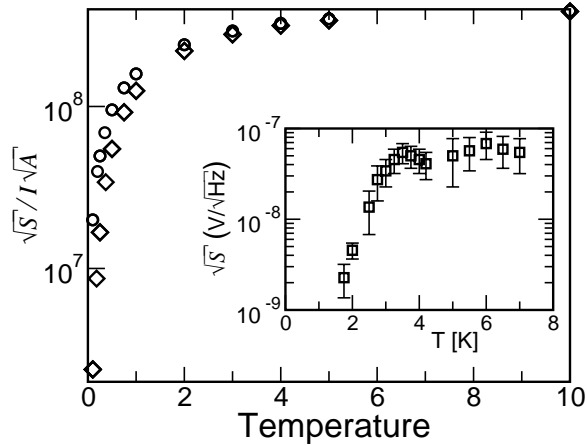


Figure 5. Noise amplitude \sqrt{S} at $\omega = 10^{-13}\gamma^{\circ}$ (or $f \sim 1\text{Hz}$) as a function of temperature for the cases with a Coulomb gap (\diamond) and without a Coulomb gap (\circ). The temperature is measured in units of E_g for the case of a finite Coulomb gap and in arbitrary units in the case of no Coulomb gap. The inset shows the experimental data for $f = 1\text{Hz}$.¹¹

gap in the density of states. In both cases we see that it decreases slightly with increasing temperature and eventually saturates in qualitative agreement with experiment.¹¹

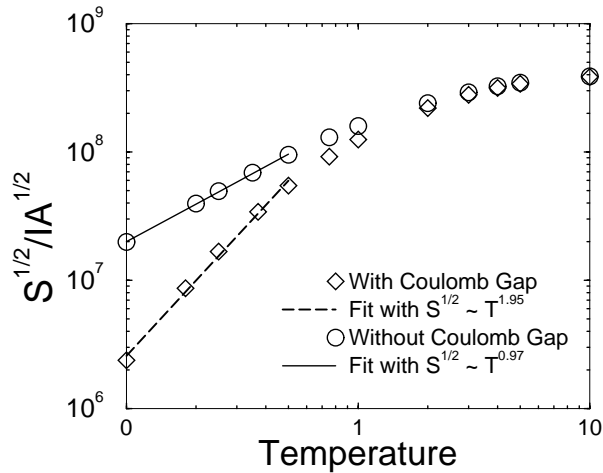


Figure 6. Current noise amplitude $S^{1/2}$ vs. temperature. This is the same data as in Fig. 5 but on a log-log plot. Notice that at low temperatures $S^{1/2} \sim T$ for a noninteracting electron glass with a flat density of states while $S^{1/2} \sim T^2$ for a Coulomb glass with a Coulomb gap in the density of states.

Fig. 5 shows that the noise amplitude \sqrt{S} grows with temperature and eventually saturates, both in good qualitative agreement with the experimental results of Massey and Lee.¹¹ The data of Massey and Lee span 2 decades in frequency while our calculations are able to cover a much broader range. Again we see from Fig. 5 that the presence of a Coulomb gap reduces the noise amplitude at low temperatures. We obtain qualitatively the same results both with and without a Coulomb gap in the density of states. We replot the data from Fig. 5 on a log-log plot in Fig. 6 in order to show that a noninteracting electron glass has a noise amplitude that increases linearly with temperature at low temperatures. This increase is due to the increase in thermally activated electron hopping with increasing temperature. It is interesting to compare this with a Coulomb glass where we found that the $1/f$ noise amplitude of the current fluctuations had a quadratic temperature dependence

at low temperatures due to the increase in thermally activated hopping as well as the filling in of the Coulomb gap with increasing temperature.

We will now discuss some of the physical reasons behind our results. The fact that we obtain $1/f$ noise is perhaps to be expected since weighted sums over Lorentzians (see Eq. (6)) often result in $1/f$ noise.¹ The subtlety lies in the temperature dependence of the noise amplitude. For simplicity let us consider the case of a density of states with no Coulomb gap which gives qualitatively the same results as the case with a Coulomb gap. The decrease in the noise amplitude \sqrt{S} with decreasing temperature is due to the presence of activated hopping processes which decrease with decreasing temperature. However, this is not at all obvious from Eq. (16). The integral for the noise power at low frequencies is dominated by large \tilde{x} which corresponds to long relaxation times $\tilde{\tau} \sim \exp(\tilde{x})$. In this case the factor of $f(\varepsilon)[1 - f(\varepsilon)]$ cancels between the numerator and denominator leaving the temperature dependence of the integrand dominated by $P_1(x, \varepsilon) \exp(-\tilde{x})$. $P_1(x, \varepsilon)$ increases while $\exp(-\tilde{x})$ decreases with decreasing temperature. The fact that our calculations yield an decrease in the noise amplitude with decreasing temperature implies that the activated hopping processes associated with $\exp(-\tilde{x})$ dominate.

As we mentioned in the introduction, experimentally the noise power does not always decrease with decreasing temperature. In some cases it increases with decreasing temperature^{12,13} but we do not know the differences in the samples which can account for this difference in behavior.

To summarize, recent experiments on $1/f$ noise¹¹ are consistent with a quasiparticle percolation picture of transport in electron glasses, though this does not exclude multi-particle correlations.

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