



# Direct mechanistic connection between acoustic signals and melt pool morphology during laser powder bed fusion

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## ABSTRACT

17 Various nondestructive diagnostic techniques have been proposed for *in situ* process monitoring of laser powder bed fusion (LPBF),  
 18 including melt pool pyrometry, whole-layer optical imaging, acoustic emission, atomic emission spectroscopy, high speed melt pool imaging,  
 19 and thermionic emission. Correlations between these *in situ* monitoring signals and defect formation have been demonstrated with acoustic  
 20 signals having been shown to predict pore formation with especially high confidence in recent machine learning studies. In this work, time-  
 21 resolved acoustic data are collected in both the conduction and keyhole welding regimes of LPBF-processed Ti-6Al-4V alloy. A non-  
 22 dimensionalized Strouhal number analysis, used in whistle aeroacoustics, is applied to demonstrate that the acoustic signals recorded in the  
 23 keyhole regimes can be directly associated with the vapor depression morphology. This mechanistic understanding developed from whistle  
 24 aeroacoustics shows that acoustic monitoring during the LPBF process can provide a direct probe into the vapor depression dynamics and  
 25 defect occurrence, especially in the keyhole regimes relevant to printing and defect formation.

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26 Laser powder bed fusion (LPBF), previously called selective laser  
 27 melting (SLM), is an additive manufacturing (AM) approach for metal  
 28 components that has proven to be an exceptionally useful fabrication  
 29 technique in many commercial and industrial applications.<sup>1</sup> LPBF AM  
 30 provides various advantages compared to conventional manufacturing  
 31 approaches, such as geometric flexibility, low production lead time,  
 32 and inexpensive tooling. Alongside the increasing adoption of this  
 33 additive manufacturing method, significant effort has also been made  
 34 to control, predict, and understand the phenomena governing the  
 35 process. While their overall behavior is predictable based on laser printing  
 36 parameters,<sup>2,3</sup> specific defect formation events are often stochastic and  
 37 unpredictable, especially when considering the varying thermal bound-  
 38 ary conditions driven by the high degree of geometric flexibility that  
 39 additive approaches permit and the tremendous number of competing  
 40 physical properties of the material, including laser absorptivity, melting  
 41 temperature, and thermal conductivity.<sup>4-6</sup> As a result, part qualifica-  
 42 tion often requires extensive destructive testing in addition to inspec-  
 43 tion through computed tomography (CT). While reliable, this can be

44 time consuming, financially costly, and not always well suited for the  
 45 small defects and complex geometries associated with AM-printed  
 46 parts. As such, *in situ* characterization techniques are well suited as a  
 47 preliminary “failure” test criteria with remarkably low time and cost  
 48 requirements.

49 Many different modalities have been proposed for *in situ* process  
 50 monitoring during LPBF, including melt pool pyrometry,<sup>7-9</sup> whole-  
 51 layer optical imaging,<sup>10,11</sup> acoustic emission,<sup>12-16</sup> high-speed melt pool  
 52 imaging,<sup>17,18</sup> and thermionic emission.<sup>19</sup> A correlation between these  
 53 *in situ* monitoring signals with defect formation has been demon-  
 54 strated in various systems.<sup>20-24</sup> Furthermore, machine learning studies  
 55 have shown qualitative correlation between acoustic signals and feature  
 56 formation as it varies with print parameters.<sup>25-31</sup> Recent work with  
 57 machine learning models has shown high probability for pore detec-  
 58 tion by combining photodiode with acoustic monitoring data in  
 59 single-track prints.<sup>32</sup> Acoustic monitoring offers complementary infor-  
 60 mation to optical methods and permits greater flexibility by not requir-  
 61 ing optical line-of-sight to the build. However, broader adoption of

62 acoustic methods has suffered from a lack of mechanistic understanding 63 compared to, for example, pyrometry where the physics of black- 64 body radiation is well understood. In pursuit of strengthening 65 confidence in acoustic monitoring, a more mechanistic understanding 66 of acoustic signal generation in LPBF is necessary. This work aims to 67 develop a mechanistic connection between the acoustic signal and 68 melt pool behavior during LPBF through analysis of single-track prints 69 using a whistle aeroacoustic model.

70 Acoustic signals were recorded during laser irradiation of 3 mm 71 long single laser tracks on Ti-6Al-4V bare plate performed using a 72 1070 nm continuous wave Yb-fiber laser (YLR-500-AC-Y14, IPG 73 Photonics) focused to a D4r diameter of 73  $\mu\text{m}$ , laser scan speeds of 74 250 and 500 mm/s, and laser powers between 100 and 400 W. The 75 experimental platform used in the present work has been described 76 previously.<sup>33</sup> Laser direction and scan speed were controlled by a 77 SCANLAB intelliSCAN scan head, which consists of a two-axis galva- 78 nometer scanning mirror system. A 1/4<sup>th</sup> free-field, prepolarized 79 microphone and preamplifier package (frequency range: 4–100 000 Hz 80 ( $\rho_2/3$  dB), dynamic range: 165 dB, 378C01, PCB Piezotronics, Inc.) 81 was installed with direct line-of-sight to the laser-sample coincident 82 plane at 44° offset angle and a working distance of 140 mm. **In situ** 83 x-ray imaging was performed at SLAC National Accelerator 84 Laboratory's Stanford Synchrotron Radiation Lightsource (SSRL) 85 beamline 2-2 using white-beam x-ray spectrum transmission x-ray 86 images of the LPBF process captured using a scintillator-based optical 87 system,<sup>32</sup> operating at 20 kfps with an effective pixel size of 2  $\mu\text{m}$  per 88 pixel. The vacuum chamber containing the sample was evacuated to 89 5–10<sup>−2</sup> Torr prior to being filled with 730 Torr argon inert gas 90 environment for processing. Argon was constantly flowed through the 91 vacuum chamber during experiments using a high-efficiency air knife 92 (Super Air Knife, Aluminum, 3 in., EXAIR) located above the substrate 93 surface. During processing, the laser was scanned across a Ti-6Al-4V 94 substrate (TMS Titanium, Poway, CA, USA) as a 2.5 mm long single 95 line. Each substrate was approximately 500- $\mu\text{m}$  thick in the x-ray 96 probe direction.

97 The acoustic data are presented in the frequency domain in time- 98 independent and time-dependent plots, generated by Fourier trans- 99 forms and wavelet transforms, respectively (Fig. 1). Plots are shown for 100 three prints performed with a scan speed of 500 mm/s and laser pow- 101 ers of 100, 200, and 400 W, corresponding to the conduction, stable 102 keyhole, and unstable keyhole regimes, respectively. The conduction 103 regime is comprised of scans throughout which the depth-to-width 104 ratio of the vapor depression remains below 1, while for the keyhole 105 regimes, the ratio is greater than 1. Prints where pores are identified 106 are further classified under the unstable regime.

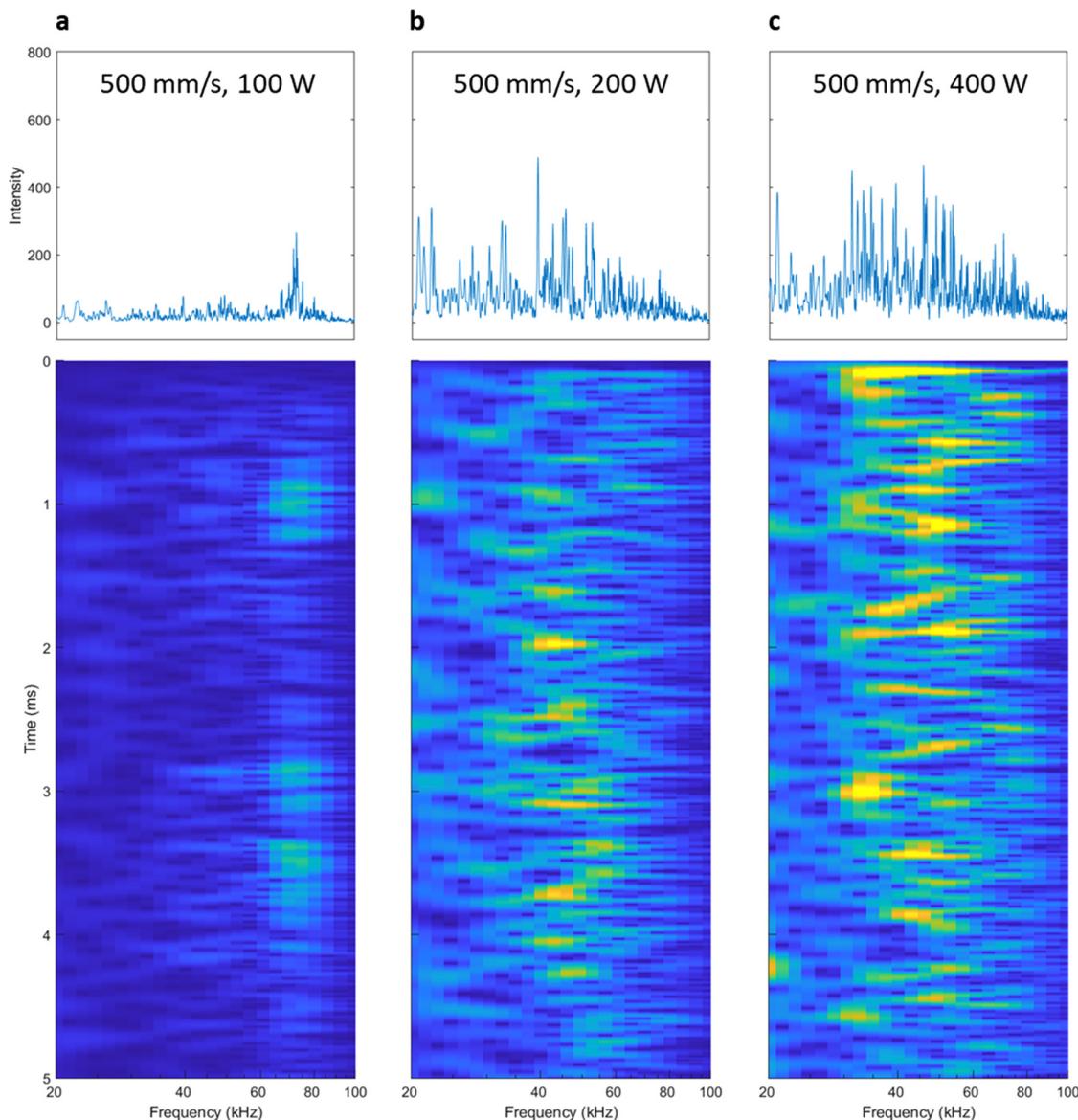
107 The 100 W case shows a narrow band of tone frequencies cen- 108 tered around 70 kHz, which is consistent with stable melt pool geo- 109 metry observed in x-ray videos. Despite the consistency in frequency, 110 fluctuations in the acoustic signal are observed with occasional short- 111 lived peaks arising and fading. The stochasticity in acoustic signals 112 notably increases with scan power, with tone frequency ranges of 113 40–60 kHz at 200 W and 30–80 kHz at 400 W. Distinctly, at 400 W, 114 these ranges are not only constituted of narrowband peaks (~10 kHz 115 wide) scattered across the wider range but also a handful of broadband 116 peaks that span nearly the entire 30–80 kHz range. Interestingly, there 117 are also cases where peaks are long-lived enough in time (>200  $\mu\text{s}$ ) to 118 experience a shift in frequency between when they first appear and

when they fade. Although this overall stochastic acoustic behavior is 119 easily correlated with high normalized enthalpy, unstable keyhole mor- 120 phology, and defect formation,<sup>34–36</sup> a deeper interpretation of the spe- 121 cific features we observe requires mechanistic understanding of the 122 acoustic phenomena.<sup>123</sup>

124 Interpretation of the acoustic signals first requires consideration 125 of the various acoustic sources present in the LPBF process, including 126 melt pool waves, solidification phenomena, and events deeper in the 127 material. Examination of the signal magnitude prior to the start of the 128 print shows that ambient experimental signals are negligible, including 129 the Ar gas recirculation system, vacuum pumps, galvo motion, and 130 other periphery systems. The low residual stress build-up in single- 131 track Ti-6Al-4V prints makes solidification cracking rare. The acoustic 132 impedance mismatch between solid Ti and gaseous Ar hinders subsur- 133 face acoustic signals reaching the airborne microphone; calculations 134 suggest that <1% of acoustic energy generated within solid or liquid 135 metal would be transmitted to a surrounding gas environment.<sup>37,38</sup> As 136 such, the airborne microphone effectively couples to gas flow associ- 137 ated with the vapor depression and reduces signal from potential sub- 138 surface sources, like cracking and bubble collapse. We are confident 139 the acoustic signals recorded and analyzed are metal vapor aeroacous- 140 tics directly coupled to the vapor depression. To interpret these metal- 141 vapor aeroacoustics and extract some mechanistic insight into vapor 142 depression dynamics, we analyze through the perspective of whistle 143 aeroacoustics.

144 A classic and elegant example of the whistle model is the steam 145 kettle whistle, which can be defined as a cylinder with two similarly 146 sized holes axially aligned on opposing chamber faces [Fig. 2(a)]. The 147 upstream hole connects the whistle body to a large chamber of higher 148 pressure relative to ambient where the gas flow originates, and the 149 downstream hole connects the whistle body with an ambient atmos- 150 phere; as gas flows through the whistle, a tone is generated. The spe- 151 cific mechanisms by which tones are generated can be classified into 152 three classes<sup>39</sup> and—for a given system—may vary based on the 153 Reynolds number  $Re = \frac{U}{4} \frac{D}{v}$ , where  $U$  is the gas velocity,  $D$  is the open- 154 ing diameter, and  $v$  is kinematic viscosity.<sup>40,41</sup> Analysis of steam kettle 155 whistles has shown that as the Reynolds number changes, there are 156 two regimes of whistle behavior; these regimes can be identified by the 157 Strouhal number  $St = \frac{f}{U} \frac{D}{U}$ , where  $f$  is the tone frequency,  $D$  is the 158 opening diameter, and  $U$  is the gas velocity.<sup>42</sup> At low Reynolds number 159 (i.e., low air velocity, large hole diameter), the emitted acoustic fre- 160 quency is constant, corresponding to a Helmholtz resonator condition 161 where the Helmholtz cavity is defined as the whistle cylinder and the 162 effective neck length is the sum of the plate thicknesses. At high 163 Reynolds number (i.e., high air velocity, small hole diameter), the 164 Strouhal number is constant, corresponding to a class III whistle, 165 which entails vortex shedding at the end of a resonating duct, similar 166 to a flute or organ pipe.<sup>41</sup>

167 Figure 2(b) is a radiograph of a vapor depression resulting from a 168 single-track print at 500 mm/s and 300 W. Contrast enhancement, 169 binarization, and median filtering are performed on the radiograph to 170 generate Fig. 2(c). We analogize the keyhole-regime vapor depression 171 as a whistle such that the whistle body is the larger chamber of height 172  $h$  and diameter  $D$ , as shown in Fig. 2(d). The gas flow source associated 173 with the upstream hole is the vapor jet with velocity  $U$  generated by 174 evaporation near the incident point of the laser beam at the bottom of 175 the vapor depression,<sup>43</sup> and the downstream hole would be the

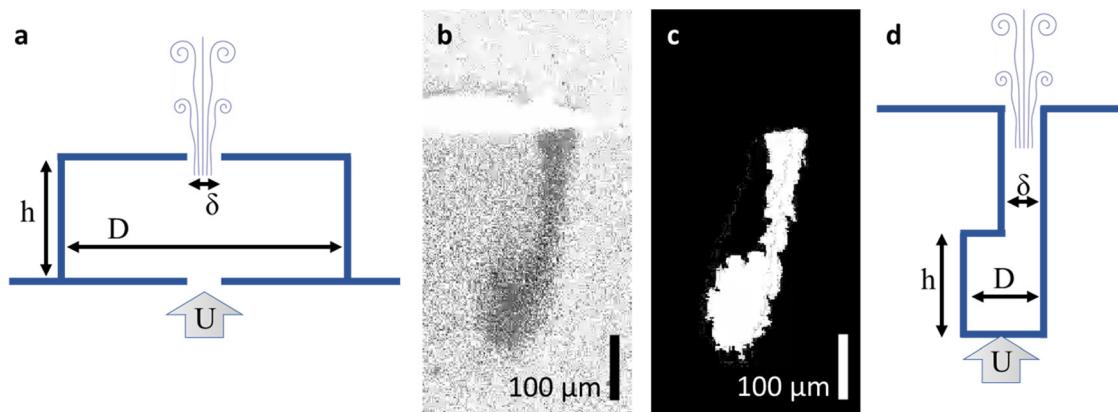


**FIG. 1.** Time-independent Fourier transforms (top) and time-dependent wavelet transforms (bottom) of acoustic data recorded during single-track irradiations on Ti-6Al-4V bare plate with laser scan speed 500 mm/s and laser powers of (a) 100, (b) 200, and (c) 400 W. These powers correspond to the conduction, stable keyhole, and unstable keyhole regimes of print behavior, respectively.

176 narrower neck of the vapor depression defined by diameter  $d$ . While  
 177 not all depressions will fit this model, we hypothesize that the system  
 178 will generate acoustic signal via a whistle mechanism when the vapor  
 179 depression dynamics align with the whistle model—i.e., tones occur  
 180 when gas flows through a larger chamber followed by a narrower  
 181 opening.

182 We proceed to demonstrate that vapor depressions can exhibit  
 183 whistle behavior through a non-dimensionalized analysis of the melt  
 184 pool aeroacoustic behavior. Precise calculation of the Reynolds num-  
 185 ber requires kinematic viscosity of the flowing gas. This is difficult to  
 186 estimate from literature values due to the mixing of gaseous metal with

187 argon at the extreme temperatures present. However, the Reynolds 188 number has been calculated using the density of the background gas 189 and surface temperature at the location of the laser spot.<sup>44</sup> With con- 190 stant background gas pressure and surface temperature in the laser 191 spot increasing monotonically with laser power, the Reynolds number 192 is expected to also increase monotonically with laser power. To permit 193 incorporation of data from a wide range of experimental and material 194 parameters, normalized enthalpy can be used in place of laser 195 power.<sup>45,46</sup> Since our current scope focuses on changes in laser power 196 at two scan speeds, we use a reduced form of normalized enthalpy 197  $P/u^{1/2}$ , with laser power  $P$  and scan speed  $u$ . From these relations,  
 198



**FIG. 2.** (a) Schematic representation of a steam kettle whistle recreated from Ref. 25 with the parameters for air velocity  $U$ , whistle diameter  $D$ , whistle height  $h$ , and opening diameter  $\delta$ . (b) X-ray radiograph of a vapor depression from a laser powder bed fusion scan at 500 mm/s and 300 W. (c) X-ray radiograph of the vapor depression after binarization. (d) Schematic representation of the vapor depression with the same parameters as defined for the steam kettle whistle.

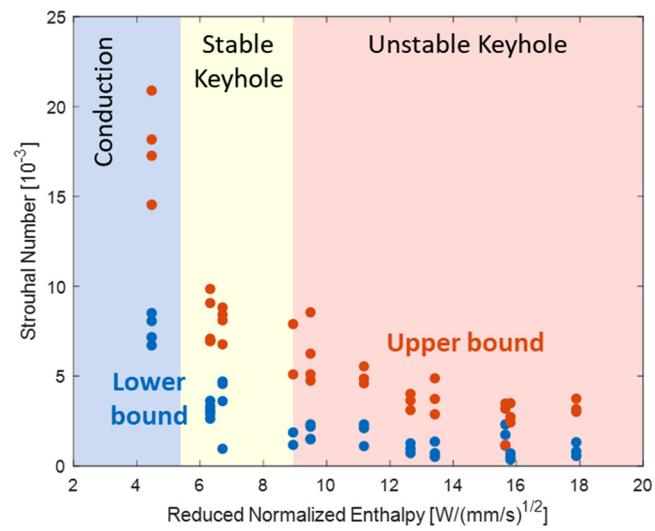
198 constant Strouhal number behavior across increasing Reynolds  
199 number—which indicates class III whistle behavior—will appear as  
200 constant Strouhal number behavior across increasing reduced normalized  
201 enthalpy.

202 The Strouhal calculation for our vapor depression system requires  
203 evaluation of the opening diameter, gas velocity, and tone frequency.  
204 The stochasticity of the melt pool and the associated vapor depression  
205 dynamics, especially at higher energy densities, requires approximations  
206 to complete these calculations. Our Strouhal number analysis is  
207 not sensitive to absolute values, rather the relation between gas velocity,  
208 frequency, and opening diameter, and how each scales with normalized  
209 enthalpy. For gas velocity  $U$ , we point to a study that used a  
210 Knudsen layer approach to show that gas velocity normal to the powder  
211 bed surface scales linearly with normalized enthalpy for stainless  
212 steel over ranges of 300–1200 m/s and 50–200 W for scan speed and  
213 laser power, respectively.<sup>47</sup> The present work operates within the same  
214 regime of normalized enthalpy when accounting for material and thermal  
215 properties as well as processing conditions. As such, we proceed in  
216 our Strouhal number analysis with gas velocity scaling linearly with  
217 reduced normalized enthalpy from 0.3 to 1.5 km/s over the range  
218 explored.

219 The tone frequency and opening diameter are observed to fluctuate  
220 within a single track at higher normalized enthalpies, specifically in  
221 the unstable keyhole regimes where the vapor depression itself is  
222 known to dramatically fluctuate. Assigning a single value to tone frequency  
223 or opening diameter for a given track would be misleading  
224 given the fluctuations. To address this, we look at the time dependence  
225 of tone frequency and vapor depression geometry to assign an upper  
226 and lower bound for both frequency and opening diameter for each  
227 given track, with smaller opening diameter corresponding to higher frequency  
228 and larger with lower. As such, two Strouhal numbers will be  
229 calculated for each given track. Opening diameter,  $d$ , is measured from  
230 binarized *in situ* x-ray imaging data. For each image frame captured  
231 during the print, the minimum width of the vapor depression is identified,  
232 and, for each track, these minimum widths are used to determine  
233 an upper and lower bound for opening diameter for the track.

234 Figure 3 shows the plot of Strouhal number vs reduced normalized  
235 enthalpy with delineations made to illustrate the conduction,

stable keyhole, and unstable keyhole regimes. The conduction and keyhole regimes are differentiated by the geometric aspect ratio of the vapor depression while the stable and unstable keyhole regimes are differentiated by *ex situ* pore identification. The acoustic data presented in Fig. 1(a) nominally correspond to the conduction regime and exhibit constant frequency behavior—similar to steam kettle whistles at low Reynolds number.<sup>42</sup> While the stable keyhole regime may act as a transitional regime, the unstable keyhole regime, where substantial frequency fluctuations occur in the acoustic data, exhibits constant Strouhal number behavior. Based on the whistle model, constant Strouhal number behavior observed here at higher laser powers reflects class III whistle acoustics, which corresponds to vortex shedding at the end of a resonating duct. These findings are consistent with recent



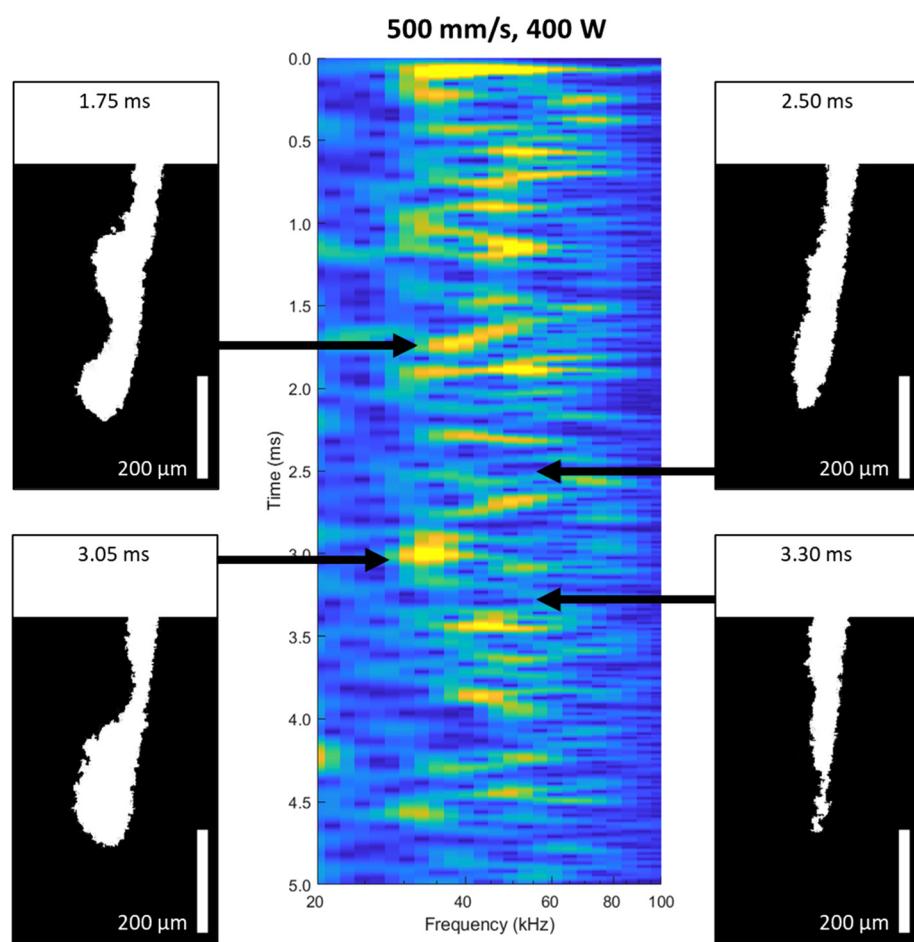
**FIG. 3.** Plot of the non-dimensionalized Strouhal number as a function of normalized enthalpy for single-track irradiations on Ti-6Al-4V bare plate. Conduction and keyhole regimes are differentiated by the geometric aspect ratio of the vapor depression. Stable and unstable keyhole regimes are differentiated by *ex situ* pore identification.

249 plume imaging works showing plume structure indicative of vortex  
 250 shedding at higher laser powers<sup>18</sup> and can be used to better understand  
 251 and further interpret melt pool morphology.

252 The present work demonstrates that the aeroacoustic principles  
 253 present in steam kettles also apply to LPBF melt pools so long as the  
 254 vapor depression morphology matches the whistle model—i.e., a nar-  
 255 rower opening downstream of a larger chamber. This understanding  
 256 allows a more detailed interpretation of the information-rich acoustic  
 257 data associated with melt pool behavior in the unstable keyhole regime.  
 258 For example, Fig. 4 shows the time-dependent acoustic data corre-  
 259 sponding to a print at 500 mm/s and 400 W [previously presented in  
 260 Fig. 1(c)] with binarized images of the vapor depression geometries  
 261 corresponding to four times during the print. The vapor depression at  
 262 1.75 ms exhibits two sequences of a narrow opening downstream of a  
 263 larger chamber while the vapor depression at 3.05 ms exhibits one  
 264 such sequence—meeting the geometric requirements of the whistle  
 265 model. The vapor depressions at 2.50 and 3.30 ms do not meet the  
 266 requirements because they exhibit constant width and monotonically  
 267 increasing width, respectively.

268 Correlation of these geometries and times with the acoustic data  
 269 shows acoustic signals recorded in the two cases where the whistle  
 270 model requirements are satisfied and shows an absence of acoustic sig-  
 271 nals where the requirements are unmet. Additionally, the acoustic  
 272 peak at 1.75 ms apparently spans >15 kHz in frequency space and  
 273 0.2 ms in time. This may be linked to the complex geometry of the  
 274 vapor depression, which shows two openings with differing diameters.  
 275 Since this print occurs in the constant Strohal regime, the opening  
 276 diameter is inversely related to the frequency of the resulting tone. As  
 277 such, multiple effective whistles within a single vapor depression would  
 278 conceivably result in acoustic signals spanning greater frequency  
 279 ranges and even multi-tone signals. The whistle model provides the  
 280 foundational framework to mechanistically understand the complex  
 281 acoustic data commonly found in the stable keyhole regime where  
 282 many LPBF processes operate.

283 The present work mechanistically links acoustic generation with  
 284 melt pool dynamics. While snapshots of vapor depression geometries  
 285 support the whistle model, capturing vapor depression evolution over  
 286 time would yield a more complete understanding of the complex



**FIG. 4.** Time-dependent acoustic data corresponding to a print at 500 mm/s and 400 W previously presented in Fig. 1(c) with binarized images of the vapor depression chosen at four times during the print. The vapor depressions at 1.75 and 3.05 ms (left) fit the geometric requirements of the whistle model whereas the images taken at 2.50 and 3.30 ms (right) do not. Correlation of these times with the time-dependent acoustic data shows acoustic signals at 1.75 and 3.05 ms and shows a lack of signal at 2.50 and 3.30 ms.

287 acoustic signatures. This is especially true for cases where the acoustic  
 288 signal appears to persist and shift in frequency over some time—as  
 289 identified in Fig. 4 and as is characteristic of unstable keyhole behavior.  
 290 Additionally, extension of this work to better reflect industry-relevant  
 291 conditions is vital for wider applicability of the present model. This  
 292 includes powder experiments to investigate the wider validity of the  
 293 whistle model and full-scale, multi-layer prints to determine the scal-  
 294 ability. Further development of the whistle model for vapor depres-  
 295 sions will increase the melt pool information extracted from acoustic  
 296 monitoring and strengthen the overall effectiveness of *in situ* monitor-  
 297 ing techniques.

298 The whistle model presented offers a direct connection between  
 299 the acoustic signals captured during the LPBF process and the physi-  
 300 cal attributes of the melt pool, especially in the keyhole regimes relevant  
 301 to printing. This model enables interpretation of complex  
 302 acoustic data to a greater extent than previously available by provid-  
 303 ing an empirical connection between acoustic frequency and vapor  
 304 depression geometry via the Strouhal number. The mechanistic  
 305 understanding of vapor depression aeroacoustics detailed in this work  
 306 suggests that process monitoring techniques based on acoustic meth-  
 307 ods will be broadly transferrable to different materials and machine  
 308 architectures. These findings hope to bridge the gap in physical  
 309 understanding between acoustic and optical techniques to promote  
 310 more widespread adoption of acoustic monitoring approaches. By  
 311 offering insight into the sub-surface morphology of the vapor depres-  
 312 sion, this model hopes to present acoustic monitoring as a comple-  
 313 mentary technique to existing optical approaches. With further  
 314 development of this model, *in situ* acoustic monitoring can be an  
 315 accessible and reliable method of probing melt pool dynamics, melt  
 316 pool depth, and the onset of pore detection in many materials and  
 317 industrial-scale builds.

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### 331 Conflict of Interest

332 The authors have no conflicts to disclose.

### 333 Author Contributions

334 **Yuchen Sun:** Conceptualization (lead); Data curation (lead); Formal  
 335 analysis (lead); Investigation (lead); Validation (lead); Visualization  
 336 (lead); Writing – original draft (lead); Writing – review & editing  
 337 (lead). **Sanam Gorgannejad:** Investigation (equal); Methodology  
 338 (equal); Writing – review & editing (equal). **Aiden Martin:**  
 339 Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal); Writing – review & editing  
 340 (equal). **Jenny Nicolino:** Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal).  
 341 **Maria Strantza:** Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal).

**Jean-Baptiste Forien:** Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal). 342  
**Vivek Thampy:** Investigation (equal); Methodology (equal). **Sen Liu:** 343  
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 (equal). **Nicholas P. Calta:** Conceptualization (equal); Funding 348  
 acquisition (lead); Investigation (lead); Methodology (lead); Project 349  
 administration (lead); Supervision (lead); Writing – review & editing 350  
 (equal). 351  
 352

## 353 DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from 354  
 the corresponding author upon reasonable request. 355

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