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**Using X-ray computed tomography to describe the dynamics  
of nitrous oxide emissions during soil drying**

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1 **Using X-ray computed tomography to describe the dynamics of nitrous oxide emissions**  
2 **during soil drying**

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7 **Impact statement**

8 We proposed a methodology to image the water dynamics and the soil structure of a soil  
9 sample with X-ray computed tomography, while controlling the hydric state and monitoring  
10 N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes. Relevant information about N<sub>2</sub>O transport could be extracted from the images.

11 **Abstract**

12 Water in soil is known to be a key factor for controlling nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) emissions,  
13 because N<sub>2</sub>O is mainly produced by denitrification in anoxic environments. In this study, we  
14 proposed a methodology to image the water and soil structure of a soil sample with X-ray  
15 computed tomography, while controlling the hydric state and monitoring N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes. We  
16 used a multistep outflow system to apply two wetting-drying cycles to an undisturbed soil.  
17 The soil core was scanned with coarse-resolution X-ray computed tomography, one time  
18 during wetting and several times during drying, to measure quantitative and qualitative  
19 indicators of the pore network. Nitrous oxide emissions were higher during the first (C1) than  
20 during the second (C2) wetting-drying cycle, both for the wetting and the drying phases.  
21 Fluxes increased quickly after the beginning of the drying phase to reach a peak after 5 h.  
22 Differences in the intensity of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions between the two cycles were attributed to  
23 differences in the water saturation, air-phase connectivity, and relative gas diffusion  
24 coefficient, which led to more or less N<sub>2</sub>O production, consumption, and entrapment in soil.  
25 The speed of the N<sub>2</sub>O emissions at the beginning of the drying phase depended on the rate of  
26 increase of the air-filled pore volume and connectivity, and was especially well described by  
27 the estimated relative gas diffusion coefficient. Parameters of the soil structure were not able  
28 to explain completely the intensity of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions during drying: N<sub>2</sub>O production and  
29 consumption factors were also involved.

30 **Abbreviations:** C1: first wetting-drying cycle; C2: second wetting-drying cycle; WFPS:  
31 water filled pore space.

## 32 **1 Introduction**

33 Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) concentration in the atmosphere is constantly increasing (Khalil et al.,  
34 2002). With a global warming potential 300 times higher than that of carbon dioxide over a  
35 100-year time scale (World Meteorological Organization, 2007), N<sub>2</sub>O is the gas with the third  
36 largest contribution to global warming (Ciais et al., 2013). Nitrous oxide plays also an  
37 important role in the stratospheric ozone depletion (Ravishankara et al., 2009). Soils are a  
38 major source of N<sub>2</sub>O, accounting for 60% of natural sources (soils under natural vegetation)  
39 and 60% of anthropogenic sources (soils used for agriculture; Ciais et al., 2013). Nitrous  
40 oxide is produced during the natural microbial reactions of nitrification and denitrification,  
41 two reactions which are controlled by the status of aerobiosis in soils. Since the water  
42 saturation of soils modifies the ratio between water-filled and air-filled pore space, the water-  
43 filled pore space (WFPS) is often used as an indicator of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (Butterbach-Bahl et  
44 al., 2013; Robertson, 1989). In particular, wetting and drying cycles are known to affect N<sub>2</sub>O  
45 emissions (Guo et al., 2014; Muhr et al., 2008). Peaks of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions have often been  
46 observed both in the field and in laboratory experiments after the rewetting of a soil  
47 (Groffman and Tiedje, 1988; Sanchez-Martin et al., 2010; Sexstone et al., 1985).

48 Following the model proposed by Smith (1980), N<sub>2</sub>O production can occur inside anoxic  
49 aggregates and then diffuse to the soil surface through inter-aggregate pores. Thus, delays  
50 between microbial production and the moment when N<sub>2</sub>O can be measured at the soil surface  
51 have been demonstrated (Clough et al., 1998; McCarty et al., 1999; Rabot et al., 2014; Weier  
52 et al., 1993; Wollersheim et al., 1987). Delays in N<sub>2</sub>O emissions are partly linked to gas  
53 entrapment and the associated dissolution of N<sub>2</sub>O in the water phase (Clough et al., 2005). We  
54 hypothesize here that introducing dynamic indicators of the soil structure could enhance our

55 understanding of the dynamic nature of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions during wetting and drying cycles, by a  
56 better description of N<sub>2</sub>O transport. Indeed, since soil structure controls the water and gas  
57 dynamics in soils, and thus the aerobic microbial activity, soil structure is supposed to be of  
58 great importance for N<sub>2</sub>O emissions (Ball, 2013).

59 Both the soil water and soil structure can be studied by X-ray computed tomography. X-ray  
60 computed tomography is rapid, non-destructive, and allows successive scans over time while  
61 measuring other dynamic parameters, such as N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes. It provides 3-D images, used to  
62 perform spatial analysis of the soil sample. In soil science, X-ray computed tomography is a  
63 common tool, used for example to study the effect of agricultural practices (Deurer et al.,  
64 2009; Schjønning et al., 2013; Schlüter et al., 2011), the water dynamics (Kasteel et al., 2000;  
65 Sammartino et al., 2012; Wildenschild et al., 2005), or the gas dynamics (Deurer et al., 2009;  
66 Katuwal et al., 2014; Naveed et al., 2013). Katuwal et al. (2014) demonstrated the interest of  
67 coarse-resolution X-ray scanners to study gas transport functioning in macropores. This  
68 methodology can be applied to N<sub>2</sub>O emissions. Only few studies used imaging techniques to  
69 study greenhouse gas emissions (e.g., Mangalassery et al., 2014; Mangalassery et al., 2013),  
70 and to our knowledge, none of them monitored greenhouse gases while acquiring images of  
71 the soil structure.

72 In this study, we proposed a methodology to image the water and soil structure of a soil  
73 sample with coarse-resolution X-ray computed tomography, while controlling the hydric state  
74 and monitoring N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes. We aimed at demonstrating which relevant information can be  
75 extracted from the images to allow a better understanding of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions. We illustrated  
76 this methodology by subjecting a soil sample to two wetting and drying cycles.

## 77 2 Material and methods

### 78 2.1 Soil sampling, physical and chemical characterization

79 The study site was chosen for the high N<sub>2</sub>O emissions previously recorded in the field (Gu et  
80 al., 2011), at the same location as the study of Rabot et al. (2014). The site is an agricultural  
81 field cultivated with rape (*Brassica napus* L.), located near Chartres, in the northwest of  
82 France (48.376° N lat, 1.196° E long). The soil is classified as Glossic Retisol (WRB, 2014),  
83 with a clay content of 13.7%, a silt content of 82.0%, and a sand content of 4.3% (Rabot et al.,  
84 2014). A soil core was collected in June 2013 in a PVC cylinder (13.2-cm inner diameter by  
85 7-cm height) from the surface horizon (1–8 cm). Bulk soil was also sampled in the surface  
86 horizon for physical and chemical analyses. Soil organic carbon was measured by  
87 sulfochromic oxidation, and total nitrogen was measured by the Dumas method. The soil  
88 nitrate content was determined by colorimetric analysis after the extraction from an 8-g soil  
89 sample using 0.5 M K<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. Soil pH was determined in a 1:2.5 soil/water volume ratio on  
90 samples sieved at < 2 mm. At the sampling time, the soil organic carbon was 9.5 g kg<sup>-1</sup>, the  
91 total nitrogen content was 0.91 g kg<sup>-1</sup>, the nitrate content was 51.3 mg NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>-N kg<sup>-1</sup>, and the  
92 soil pH was 5.6. The porosity of the soil sample was 0.46 cm<sup>3</sup> cm<sup>-3</sup> and the volumetric water  
93 content was 37.7% (equivalent to 81.9% WFPS). The sample was conditioned in a plastic bag  
94 and stored field moist during two weeks at 5°C to minimize microbial activity. Before the  
95 start of the experiment, the soil core was trimmed on each end and maintained at 20°C for 24  
96 h.

### 97 2.2 Experimental setup

98 The experiment consisted in controlling the hydric status of the soil sample with a multistep  
99 outflow system (Weihermüller et al., 2009): the soil cylinder was connected to a water-tank to  
100 control its wetting according to the Mariotte bottle principle, and connected to a vacuum

101 pump and a sampling bottle to control its drying (Fig. 1). Hydraulic continuity was ensured  
102 with a porous ceramic plate (1-bar air-entry value,  $8.6 \times 10^{-8} \text{ m s}^{-1}$  saturated hydraulic  
103 conductivity, Soilmoisture Equipment Corp.) placed at the bottom of the soil cylinder and  
104 previously saturated with water. The soil cylinder-ceramic plate system was sealed with  
105 silicon to avoid water or gas leaks. Both the water content and water potential were  
106 continuously monitored during the experiment, with a balance (0.1 g precision) and two  
107 microtensiometers (porous ceramic cup, 20-mm length, 2.2-mm diam., 150-kPa air-entry  
108 value) inserted at 2 and 4 cm from the cylinder surface at the end of the wetting phase. Data  
109 were recorded every 10 min with a datalogger (CR1000, Campbell Scientific).

110 Two wetting-drying cycles (hereafter referred to as the C1 and C2 cycles) were applied to the  
111 soil cylinder. The initial water content for C1 was the water content at sampling. The sample  
112 was first saturated for 3 d by raising the water level to the soil surface in one step, and then a  
113  $-100 \text{ hPa}$  pressure was applied at the bottom of the soil core in one step, and maintained for  
114 about 7 h (C1 cycle). A zero hPa pressure was then applied for 3 d, followed by a  $-100 \text{ hPa}$   
115 pressure for about 7 h (C2 cycle). Indeed, Rabot et al. (2014) demonstrated that  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  peaks  
116 can be created during the drying phase, at a matric potential of approximately  $-50 \text{ hPa}$ . We  
117 chose thus to apply a pressure lower than this value of  $-50 \text{ hPa}$ . The speed of the matric  
118 potential decrease was much higher than under natural conditions, and could affect the water  
119 transport and hydraulic continuity. We used a  $\text{KNO}_3$  solution as the wetting fluid, to ensure  
120 that nitrate was not a limiting factor for  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions during the wetting phase, and to  
121 isolate the effects of nitrate concentration and soil moisture on the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions. Hénault  
122 and Germon (2000) showed that the response of  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions to the nitrate concentration  
123 could be described by a Michaelis-Menten function. We used a nitrate concentration at the  
124 plateau of this function ( $4.1 \text{ mM N}$ ). The nitrate solution was prepared with de-aired water to  
125 prevent air bubble formation during the experiment.

126 Nitrous oxide emissions were monitored by infrared correlation spectroscopy (N<sub>2</sub>O Analyzer  
127 model 46i, Thermo Scientific) using a 4-L volume closed-chamber. The emissions were  
128 measured for 20-min periods, and the concentration value was recorded every minute. Given  
129 the linear increase of the N<sub>2</sub>O concentration in the closed-chamber, N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes were  
130 calculated linearly from the observed change in concentration during the first 10 min after the  
131 chamber was closed. Only one N<sub>2</sub>O flux measurement was done during wetting, at the end of  
132 each wetting phase for each cycle, and seven (respectively eight) flux measurements were  
133 recorded during the drying phase for the C1 (respectively C2) cycle. Moreover, gases inside  
134 the chamber were sampled in evacuated vials at the end of the wetting phase and at the middle  
135 of the drying phase (3.5 h after the beginning of the drying phase), and CO<sub>2</sub> concentration was  
136 determined by gas chromatography (μGC Gas Analyzer T-3000, SRA Instruments). For a  
137 single CO<sub>2</sub> flux measurement, the atmosphere of the closed-chamber was sampled three times  
138 during 20-min periods. Given the linear increase of the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration, the flux was then  
139 calculated linearly. The chamber was removed before each measurement to restore the  
140 atmosphere to ambient concentrations of gases. The sample was kept inside the scanner  
141 during the two wetting-drying cycles. The temperature inside the scanner room was monitored  
142 and ranged between 22.5 and 25.5°C throughout the experiment.

### 143 2.3 Computed tomography and image analyses

144 The soil sample was placed in the scanner in its sampling direction. The soil sample was  
145 scanned one time at the end of the wetting phase, and the vacuum pump was then activated to  
146 begin the soil drying. We then scanned the sample seven times for C1, and nine times for C2  
147 during the drying phase, alternating with N<sub>2</sub>O flux measurements. Two scans have been added  
148 at C2 compared to C1 to refine the results just after the beginning of the drying phase. We  
149 used a medical X-ray tomograph (Siemens Somatom Definition AS) operating at an energy



150 level of 200 kV and a current of 140 mA. The voxel size was  $316 \times 316 \times 100 \mu\text{m}$ . The scanning  
151 duration was 15 seconds. In the following, intensities are expressed in Hounsfield units (HU).  
152 Most of the image processing was realized with the ImageJ software (Rasband, 1997-2014).  
153 Due to the chamber manipulation during the experiment and displacement of the sample  
154 between scans, image registration was first done to ensure spatial consistency between the  
155 different images with the Align3 TP plugin (Parker, 2012). We cropped the images to exclude  
156 non-soil areas, and we rescaled the images to get isotropic voxels of  $316 \mu\text{m}$ . The noise was  
157 reduced by using a bilateral filter, and edges were enhanced with an unsharp mask (Schlüter  
158 et al., 2014). The air phase and the water phase were both separated from the soil matrix and  
159 gravels by using the watershed segmentation method. This method has previously been  
160 successfully used to segment images of soils (Schlüter et al., 2014). A majority filter with a  
161  $3 \times 3 \times 3$  kernel was applied to remove very small air-filled and water-filled pores which can be  
162 seen as noise. We finally removed manually the signal of the two tensiometers. The procedure  
163 used to segment the air phase and the water phase gave satisfactory results (Fig. 2).  
164 Visualization of the air-filled and water-filled pore network was done with the ImageJ plugin  
165 3-D Viewer (Schmid et al., 2010).

166 The volume of air-filled and water-filled macropores was estimated with the BoneJ plugin  
167 (Doube et al., 2010), and the Euler number was calculated considering 26-connectivity with  
168 the C library QuantIm v.4 (Vogel, 2008), on the segmented images. The Euler number  
169 characterizes the connectivity of the air-filled pore space (Vogel et al., 2010). When the Euler  
170 number is positive, the pore network is classified as unconnected, whereas it is connected  
171 when the Euler number is negative. The volume of air-filled macropores and Euler number  
172 were calculated on the total air-filled pores identified, and the air-filled pores connected to the  
173 soil surface only, to evaluate the pore network contributing to  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  emissions. We estimated  
174 the relative gas diffusion coefficients  $D_S/D_0$  from the segmented air-filled pore space with

175 QuantIm v.4 (Vogel, 2008), as already done by Deurer et al. (2009) and Vogel et al. (2002).  
176 The gas diffusion was modeled by using the Fick's law of diffusion in 3-D, solved by explicit  
177 finite differences. Throughout the simulation, the gas concentration at the bottom of the soil  
178 sample was fixed at a constant value, and the gas concentration at the top was set to zero. We  
179 calculated  $D_S/D_0$  on subsamples of increasing thickness from the soil surface (adding 10  
180 pixels at the bottom of the given subsample).

## 181 **3 Results**

### 182 **3.1 Soil water content and soil water potential evolution**

183 During the drying phase, the WFPS measured with the MSO system ranged between 85% and  
184 79% at C1, and between 83% and 79% at C2. The soil matric potential was above 0 cm for  
185 the two wetting cycles for the -4 cm depth tensiometer, whereas it was slightly under 0 cm for  
186 the -2 cm depth tensiometer at C2 (Fig. 3). Saturation was thus slightly lower during C2. The  
187 matric potential showed a plateau at the C2 wetting phase, reached in approximately 4.5 h  
188 after the beginning of the C2 wetting phase. During the drying phase, the matric potential  
189 decreased linearly, immediately after activating the vacuum pump, to reach -56 cm water  
190 column at C1 and -67 cm water column at C2. The decrease of the matric potential was  
191 slightly faster at C2 than at C1 (mean decrease of  $-8.8 \text{ cm h}^{-1}$  at C1, and  $-9.5 \text{ cm h}^{-1}$  at C2).

### 192 **3.2 Dynamics of the N<sub>2</sub>O and CO<sub>2</sub> fluxes**

193 Emissions were lower during C2 than during C1, both for the wetting and the drying phases,  
194 with the maximum N<sub>2</sub>O flux being  $55.1 \text{ mg N m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C1, and  $19.1 \text{ mg N m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C2  
195 (Fig. 3). Nitrous oxide fluxes were measured to be  $9.4$  and  $0.1 \text{ mg N m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at the end of the  
196 C1 and C2 wetting phase, respectively. In comparison, they ranged between 0 and  $2.6 \text{ mg N}$   
197  $\text{m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  in the field measurements of Gu et al. (2011) on the same study site. Nitrous oxide

198 fluxes increased quickly during the drying phase to reach a peak approximately 5.5 h after the  
199 beginning of the soil drying at C1, and 4.5 h at C2. Peaks occurred at a mean matric potential  
200 of  $-41.1$  cm water column at C1, and  $-44.7$  cm at C2, and at a WFPS of 80.2% at C1 and  
201 80.5% at C2. The increase in the  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  fluxes was faster for C1 than for C2. The first flux  
202 measurement of C1 was especially high ( $38.2 \text{ mg N m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ ) compared to the following  
203 measurements. At C2, the fluxes measured at the beginning of the drying phase increased  
204 more slowly, with fluxes between  $3.3$  and  $3.9 \text{ mg N m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  for the three first measurements.  
205 Carbon dioxide fluxes were higher at C2 than at C1 at the end of the wetting phase ( $50.4 \text{ mg}$   
206  $\text{CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C1, and  $164.1 \text{ mg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C2). An opposite trend was observed during  
207 the drying phase:  $\text{CO}_2$  fluxes were higher at C1 than at C2 ( $108.3 \text{ mg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C1, and  
208  $76.1 \text{ mg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  at C2). Soil pH at the end of the two wetting-drying cycles was 5.9.

### 209 3.3 Characterization of the pore network

210 Four components could be identified, both visually and in the histograms of each image: air  
211 phase, water phase, soil matrix, and gravels (Fig. 4 and 5). We define the soil matrix as the  
212 solid phase and pores with a size lower than the image resolution. Histograms appeared to be  
213 unimodal, with the mode corresponding to the soil matrix, because the air-filled and water-  
214 filled porosities represented only a small fraction of the soil sample volume (Fig. 4a and 4b).  
215 A small peak near the pure air intensity value ( $-1024$  HU) could be identified for the drying  
216 phase, and a small peak near the pure water intensity value ( $0$  HU) could be identified for the  
217 wetting phase (Fig. 4c and 4d). Less water voxels and more air voxels were identified at C2  
218 than at C1 during the wetting phase, showing that the water saturation was lower at C2 (Fig.  
219 4c and 4d).

220 A 3-D rendering of the air phase and water phase distributions at the end of the wetting phase  
221 and at the end of the drying phase for C1 and C2 is given in Fig. 5. Cylindrical pores,

222 probably earthworm burrows and root channels (of which one major root channel of  
223 approximately 9 mm diameter), as well as smaller pores attributed to inter-aggregate voids are  
224 visible. As expected, air-filled pores appeared to be more numerous at the end of the drying  
225 phase than at the end of the wetting phase. A high volume of pore remained not saturated  
226 during the experiment.

227 Most of the indicators calculated from the segmented images were highly correlated, except  
228 the Euler number and  $D_s/D_0$  (Table 1). Indeed, largest pores highly contributed to the  
229 porosity, but relatively little to Euler number (Vogel et al., 2002), and  $D_s/D_0$  includes  
230 additional information about the tortuosity. The air-filled porosity identified ranged between  
231 0.029 and 0.035  $\text{cm}^3 \text{cm}^{-3}$  at C1, and between 0.023 and 0.035  $\text{cm}^3 \text{cm}^{-3}$  at C2. In the driest  
232 scan of C2, where the maximum air-filled pore volume has been identified, this air-filled  
233 porosity is equivalent to 16% of the real air-filled porosity at a pressure of  $-100$  hPa, or 7.5%  
234 of the total porosity ( $0.46 \text{ cm}^3 \text{cm}^{-3}$ ). For the total core volume, time-evolution of the air-  
235 filled pore volume showed a rapid rise from the beginning to 1 h after the soil drying, and  
236 then the system entered a state of equilibrium (Fig. 6a). C1 and C2 followed the same trend,  
237 but the air-filled pore volume was significantly higher at C2 than at C1 at the end of the  
238 wetting phase, and slightly higher at C2 than at C1 during the drying phase. The volume of  
239 water-filled pores decreased quickly in the first hour of soil drying, and remained lower at C2  
240 than at C1 during the whole experiment (Fig. 6a). The evolution of the air-filled pores  
241 connected to the soil surface showed the same trend as for the total core volume, except that  
242 no more difference can be seen between C1 and C2 after 2 h of soil drying (Fig. 6c).

243 For the total air-filled pore volume identified, the Euler number ranged between 1319 and  
244 1849 at C1, and between 1405 and 1713 at C2 (Fig. 6b). Thus, the Euler number was positive  
245 during the whole experiment, meaning that the air-filled pore network was unconnected at the  
246 resolution of the images. The Euler number was lower at C2 than at C1 during the wetting

247 phase, and higher at C2 than at C1 during the drying phase. The air-filled pore connectivity  
248 was thus better at C1 during the drying phase. The value of the Euler number tended to  
249 decrease with soil drying. For the air-filled pores connected to the soil surface only, the Euler  
250 number ranged between  $-52.5$  and  $17$  at C1, and between  $-57$  and  $1$  at C2 (Fig. 6d). A  
251 transition between an unconnected and a connected pore network occurred in the first hour of  
252 soil drying: the Euler number was positive at the end of the wetting phase, and negative  
253 during the drying phase. The inherent connectivity improved then as the soil dried. The Euler  
254 number was higher at C1 than at C2 during the whole experiment. One major pore cluster,  
255 representing 98% of the air-filled pore volume connected to the soil surface at the end of the  
256 two drying phases, was responsible for the negative value of the Euler number. The other  
257 pores were smaller and had a less complicated morphology.

258 Simulated relative gas diffusion coefficients were null for subsamples thicker than  
259 approximately 3 cm at C1, and 4 cm at C2, because deepest pores were poorly connected to  
260 the soil surface. Thus, only the upper part of the soil sample could participate to the fast  $N_2O$   
261 transport to the soil surface in the gaseous phase. The evolution with time of the gas diffusion  
262 coefficient of a 3-cm-thick subsample is given in Fig. 7. Absolute values of  $D_S/D_0$  ranged  
263 between 0.000 and 0.009 at C1, and between 0.003 and 0.005 at C2. They were higher at C2  
264 than at C1, except for the first measurement of the C1 drying phase. Relative gas diffusion  
265 coefficients increased quickly after the beginning of the soil drying at C1, and then showed  
266 lower values. This peak at C1 was concomitant with a fast increase of the  $N_2O$  flux. The  
267 increase with soil drying was slower at C2 than at C1. Trends were similar for the estimation  
268 of  $D_S/D_0$  on thinner subsamples (data not shown).

## 269 4 Discussion

### 270 4.1 The use of X-ray computed tomography for greenhouse gas emission studies

271 The experiment of the present study appeared as the first report of coupling between soil  
272 imaging, greenhouse gas flux measurements, and hydric control measured on the same  
273 sample. The use of X-ray computed tomography allowed identifying spatially the water and  
274 gas phases in the macropores, and thus determining the air-filled pore volume of these  
275 macropores at successive moments during the soil drying. At the scanner resolution, only 16%  
276 of the real air-filled porosity was identified, and the rest remained unresolved. Indeed, we  
277 used a large sample, with a size typical of that used to determine soil hydraulic properties, to  
278 approach the representative elementary volume of the soil. The pixel size was thus coarse,  
279 approximately 300  $\mu\text{m}$ . With such a resolution, only macropores are unequivocally  
280 recognized, i.e., pores  $> 300 \mu\text{m}$  with the nomenclature of Jarvis (2007). According to Young-  
281 Laplace law (assuming  $0^\circ$  degree contact angle, interfacial tension for air-water and spherical  
282 interfaces), these macropores are expected to drain at a water potential of  $-10 \text{ cm}$ .

283 Identifying a higher range of pore sizes would have been informative since macropores  
284 participate to  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  transport, whereas  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  production rather occurs in fine pores of the matrix  
285 domain (Heincke and Kaupenjohann, 1999). However, such a coarse resolution has  
286 successfully been used in previous studies to link soil structure and gas diffusion. By using X-  
287 ray computed tomography at a resolution of approximately 500  $\mu\text{m}$ , Katuwal et al. (2014)  
288 observed a high positive correlation between air permeability and the air-filled macroporosity  
289 identified in their images. Deurer et al. (2009) explained a major part of the variability of the  
290 gas diffusion coefficients by the air-filled porosity and connectivity of pores  $> 300 \mu\text{m}$   
291 identified with imaging. In the present study, despite the significant fraction of the unresolved  
292 pores which were air-filled at the end of the two drying cycles, coarse-resolution X-ray  
293 computed tomography can be used to infer  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  transport functioning. We also succeeded in

294 identifying differences in the soil moisture between the two wetting-drying cycles. This  
295 difference was consistent with the other parameters recorded, i.e., matric potential and WFPS,  
296 and allowed **inferring** differences in anoxia level in the soil profile between C1 and C2.  
297 Relative, instead of absolute, comparisons between the two wetting-drying cycles could thus  
298 be performed.

#### 299 **4.2 Nitrous oxide emissions and pore connectivity**

300 After 3 **days** of water saturation, soil drying down to –45 cm water column induced maximum  
301 N<sub>2</sub>O fluxes. This result has been previously observed by Rabot et al. (2014). They  
302 hypothesized that the gas diffusion coefficient increased as the soil dried and allowed the  
303 release of the N<sub>2</sub>O previously entrapped during the wetting phase in the pore space or in the  
304 soil solution. Nitrous oxide entrapment in soils at high WFPS has already been highlighted in  
305 laboratory experiments (Clough et al., 1998; McCarty et al., 1999; Weier et al., 1993). In this  
306 new study, supplementary information about the soil structure was obtained and we were able  
307 to measure an increase of the air-filled macropores connected to the soil surface as the soil  
308 dried. The **air-filled pore network** connected to the soil surface was described as well  
309 **interconnected** during the drying phase. Fast N<sub>2</sub>O transport in the gaseous phase could occur  
310 from the soil upper part connected to the atmosphere **during the drying phase**, where some  
311 biological hotspots **could be** active (Ball et al., 2008; van der Weerden et al., 2012). The  
312 porous network was probably also connected by pores of a size lower than the one recorded  
313 by the X-ray scanner, which represent approximately 85% of the air-filled pore space at a  
314 **pressure of –100 hPa**. The observed increase of the air-filled pore volume connected to the  
315 soil surface, pore connectivity, and **relative coefficient of gas diffusion** with soil drying favors  
316 the hypothesis of Rabot et al. (2014), stating that entrapped N<sub>2</sub>O was released during the  
317 **drying phase**.



318 By considering the whole pore volume, the pore network was classified as unconnected  
319 during the experiment. Firstly, given that the value of the Euler number depends on the size of  
320 the lower pore which can be resolved (Vogel et al., 2010), the soil sample may have been  
321 connected by unresolved air-filled pores. With a coarse-resolution scanner, we underestimate  
322 the connectivity of the soil sample. Secondly, the Euler number is a metrics highly affected by  
323 isolated voxels (Renard and Allard, 2013), like unconnected structural pores or thresholding  
324 artifacts, leading to highly positive values. Katuwal et al. (2014) observed that the Euler  
325 number was not a good measure of macropore connectivity to compare soil samples.  
326 Evolution of the Euler number for the whole identified pore volume is thus difficult to  
327 interpret, especially as a large fraction of the pore space remained unresolved. We favor the  
328 use of the Euler number for the pores connected to the soil surface, which, by construction,  
329 includes less isolated pores. Despite a high computational cost, the estimation of  $D_S/D_0$  from  
330 the segmented pore network appeared to better describe  $N_2O$  transport, by showing an  
331 evolution similar to that of  $N_2O$  fluxes: a fast increase at C1 and a slow increase at C2. The  
332 relative gas diffusion coefficient provided comprehensive information, by taking into account  
333 the pore network connectivity and tortuosity, and was less affected by isolated voxels.

#### 334 **4.3 Intensity of nitrous oxide emissions**

335 By comparing the two wetting and drying cycles, differences in the amount of  $N_2O$  emitted  
336 were observed. Emissions were lower at C2 than at C1 both during the wetting and the drying  
337 phases. A lower water content at C2 may have been responsible for the lower  $N_2O$  production  
338 during the C2 wetting phase. Moreover, the higher connectivity and relative gas diffusion  
339 coefficient at C2 during the wetting phase caused lower  $N_2O$  entrapment in soil, and could  
340 also explain the lower  $N_2O$  release during the C2 drying phase. Balaine et al. (2013)  
341 suggested that  $N_2O$  emissions were low for  $D_S/D_0 < 0.006$  in their experiment on repacked  
342 soil samples at a hydric steady-state, because  $N_2O$  was entrapped in the soil and because the



343 reduction of  $N_2O$  into  $N_2$  was high. The observations in our present study support these  
344 findings, as we estimated values of  $D_s/D_0 < 0.006$  during the wetting phase, and we observed  
345  $N_2O$  entrapment. Nitrous oxide reduction into  $N_2$  is expected to occur two or three days after  
346 the water saturation of a soil sample (Letey et al., 1980). Nitrous oxide consumption probably  
347 occurred in the present study during the wetting phase, as WFPS  $> 90\%$  favors this reaction  
348 (Ruser et al., 2006). Small differences in WFPS between the wetting phases of C1 and C2  
349 could have caused differences in  $N_2O$  consumption. In the literature, reduced  $N_2O$  production  
350 after a second wetting and drying cycle has also been explained by the C and N dynamics in  
351 relation to the microbial dynamics activity (Fierer and Schimel, 2002; Mikha et al., 2005;  
352 Muhr et al., 2008). In our study, nitrate was supplied in excess during the wetting phase of  
353 each wetting-drying cycle, so nitrate was supposed not to be limiting at the beginning of each  
354 wetting-drying phase. On the contrary, the carbon dynamics can be implicated in the lower  
355 emissions at C2. A shortage of C after a first wetting-drying cycle may have consumed easily  
356 available C substrates (Fierer and Schimel, 2002), and/or less C substrates may have been  
357 exposed to microbial consumption at C2, by the physical disruption of soil aggregates during  
358 the wetting-drying cycles (Denef et al., 2001).

#### 359 **4.4 Timing of nitrous oxide emissions**

360 In addition to the differences in terms of intensities of  $N_2O$  emissions between the two wetting  
361 and drying cycles, differences in the timing of the  $N_2O$  peaks were also observed. The matric  
362 potential appeared to be a good indicator of the timing of  $N_2O$  emissions, as already shown by  
363 Castellano et al. (2010), because the matric potential defines the diameter of the water-filled  
364 pores. We found that maximum  $N_2O$  fluxes were reached at approximately  $-45$  cm water  
365 column, that is to say when pores with diameter  $> 66 \mu m$  were drained. This is consistent with  
366 the experiment of Castellano et al. (2010), who observed in their free drainage experiment  
367 that  $N_2O$  peaks occurred when pores with diameter  $> 80 \mu m$  were drained. In the experiment

368 of Balaine et al. (2013), N<sub>2</sub>O peaks were observed when pores with diameter > 197 and > 57  
369 μm were drained, in soils repacked at bulk densities 1.1 and 1.5 g cm<sup>-3</sup>, respectively.

370 The timing can also be compared between the two wetting-drying cycles. In our study, N<sub>2</sub>O  
371 fluxes were very high soon after the beginning of the C1 drying phase contrary to C2. Indeed,  
372 less N<sub>2</sub>O may have been produced during the C2 wetting phase, leading to a lower gas  
373 concentration gradient between the soil surface and the atmosphere, and thus to a slower gas  
374 diffusion. Moreover, the lower rate of increase at C2 than at C1 of the air-filled pore volume,  
375 connectivity, and relative gas diffusion coefficient, at the beginning of the drying phase, could  
376 also explain the slower N<sub>2</sub>O emissions at the beginning of the C2 drying phase. These  
377 variables were highly correlated, so only one of them could have been computed. The volume  
378 of air-filled pores and the Euler number of pores connected to the soil surface were easily  
379 calculated, but the relative gas diffusion coefficient appeared to be more efficient to describe  
380 the timing of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions.

### 381 **Conclusion**

382 We hypothesized that introducing dynamic indicators of the soil structure could enhance our  
383 understanding of the dynamic nature of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions by soils. The experiment performed in  
384 this study was intended to demonstrate the ability of a coupling between coarse-resolution X-  
385 ray computed tomography, hydric control and N<sub>2</sub>O flux measurements, to better describe N<sub>2</sub>O  
386 transport in soils. X-ray computed tomography is a rapid and non-destructive method, which  
387 allowed measuring an evolution of the air phase volume, pore connectivity, and estimating the  
388 relative gas diffusion coefficient during successive wetting-drying cycles on the same soil  
389 sample. Contrary to the use of other characterization techniques (e.g., measurements of the  
390 gas diffusion coefficient with the one-chamber method), the hydric status of the soil has not

391 been modified by supplementary wetting-drying cycles, and N<sub>2</sub>O entrapment has not been  
392 disrupted.

393 We were able to measure an increase of the volume of the air phase connected to the soil  
394 surface, and an increase of the pore connectivity and gas diffusion coefficient as the soil dried.

395 We used the Euler number as an indicator of the connectivity of the gas phase. Because this  
396 metrics is highly affected by isolated pores, we based our interpretations on the Euler number  
397 calculated for the pore space connected to the soil surface, rather than for the whole pore  
398 space identified with imaging. Nitrous oxide emissions were lower in terms of intensity and  
399 speed during the second drying cycle. Differences in the intensity of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions were  
400 attributed to differences in the water saturation, air-phase connectivity, and relative gas  
401 diffusion coefficient, which led to more or less N<sub>2</sub>O production, consumption, and entrapment  
402 in soil. The speed of the N<sub>2</sub>O release at the beginning of the drying phase depended on the  
403 rate of increase of the air-filled pore volume, connectivity, and was especially well described  
404 by the relative gas diffusion coefficient. Parameters of the soil structure were not able to  
405 explain completely the intensity of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions during drying, as N<sub>2</sub>O production and  
406 consumption factors modified the N<sub>2</sub>O concentration gradient between the soil and the  
407 atmosphere.

408 The soil structure can be seen as a factor of the N<sub>2</sub>O flux intensity because the pore size  
409 controls N<sub>2</sub>O production by providing a favorable microbial habitat (i.e., aerobic status,  
410 substrate availability, water potential), and because the pore tortuosity and connectivity to the  
411 soil surface controls N<sub>2</sub>O emission. This study highlighted the need to find and measure  
412 dynamic indicators of the soil structure, to enhance our understanding of the dynamic nature  
413 of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions by soils. The results presented here are an illustration based on one soil  
414 sample, but the methodology is widely applicable. Even if imaging with a coarse scanner

415 resolution provided valuable data, imaging techniques at a finer spatial resolution, able to  
416 identify pores with diameter of approximately 50  $\mu\text{m}$ , would allow refining these results.

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564 **Figure captions**

565 **Fig. 1.** Schematic overview of the multistep outflow system for hydric control and nitrous  
566 oxide measurements. Intensity values corresponding to air and water are zoomed in (c) and  
567 (d).

568 **Fig. 2.** Example of a gray scale slice with the segmented water and air, at the end of the  
569 wetting phase and at the end of the drying phase.

570 **Fig. 3.** Evolution with time of the nitrous oxide fluxes and the matric potential measured by  
571 the two tensiometers. Gray areas represent the drying phases, and white areas the wetting  
572 phases. C1 is the first wetting-drying cycle, and C2 is the second wetting-drying cycle.

573 **Fig. 4.** Histograms of intensity values (16-bit), for (a) the first wetting-drying cycle, and (b)  
574 the second wetting-drying cycle. Intensity values corresponding to air and water are zoomed  
575 in (c) and (d).

576 **Fig. 5.** Three-dimensional distribution of the air phase (grey) and the water phase (blue) at the  
577 end of the wetting phase and at the end of the drying phase for the two wetting-drying cycles.

578 **Fig. 6.** Evolution with time of (a) the air-filled and water-filled pore volume, and (b) the Euler  
579 number of the total pore volume, (c) the air-filled pore volume, and (d) the Euler number of  
580 the pores connected to the soil surface, for the first and second wetting-drying cycles. The  
581 zero reference time is the beginning of the drying phase.

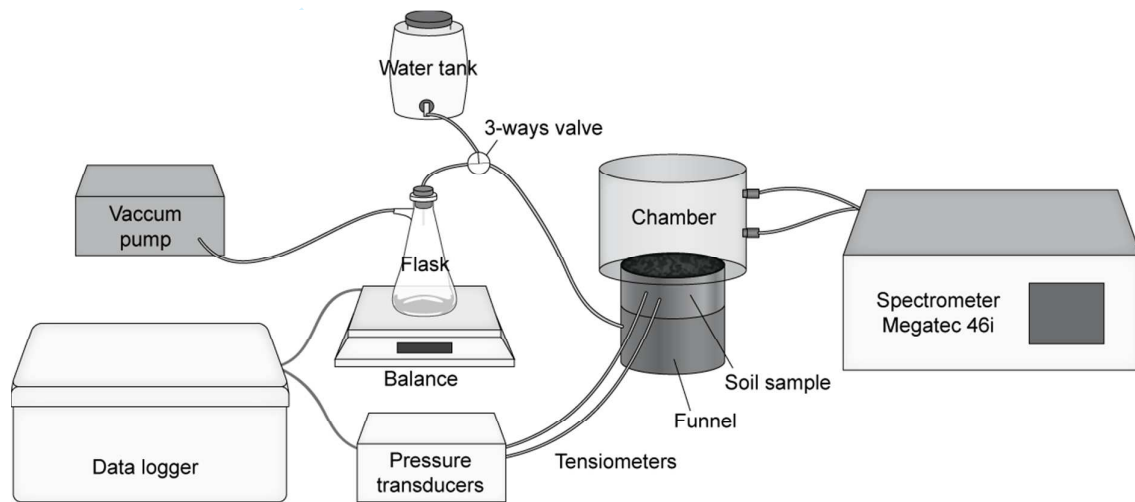
582 **Fig. 7.** Evolution with time of the relative gas diffusion coefficient of a 3-cm-thick subsample,  
583 for the first and second wetting-drying cycles. The zero reference time is the beginning of the  
584 drying phase.

585 **Tables**586 **Table 1. Pearson correlation matrix of the indicators extracted from the segmented X-ray images.**

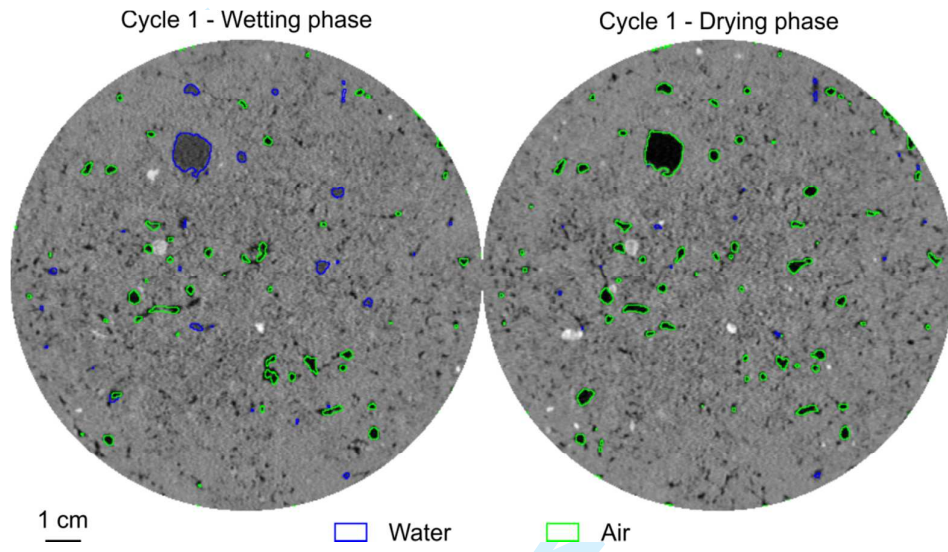
| Variables                     | Euler number (T) | Euler number (S) | Air volume (T) | Air volume (S) | Water volume (T) | Gas diffusion coefficient (T) |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Euler number (T)              | 1.00             |                  |                |                |                  |                               |
| Euler number (S)              | 0.44             | 1.00             |                |                |                  |                               |
| Air volume (T)                | -0.67            | -0.91            | 1.00           |                |                  |                               |
| Air volume (S)                | -0.72            | -0.86            | 0.99           | 1.00           |                  |                               |
| Water volume (T)              | 0.65             | 0.77             | -0.94          | -0.95          | 1.00             |                               |
| Gas diffusion coefficient (T) | 0.01             | -0.12            | 0.23           | 0.24           | -0.41            | 1.00                          |

T, calculated on the total air-filled pores identified; S, calculated on the air-filled pores connected to the soil surface.

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**Fig. 1. Schematic overview of the multistep outflow system for hydric control and nitrous oxide measurements.**



**Fig. 2.** Example of a gray scale slice with the segmented water and air, at the end of the wetting phase and at the end of the drying phase.

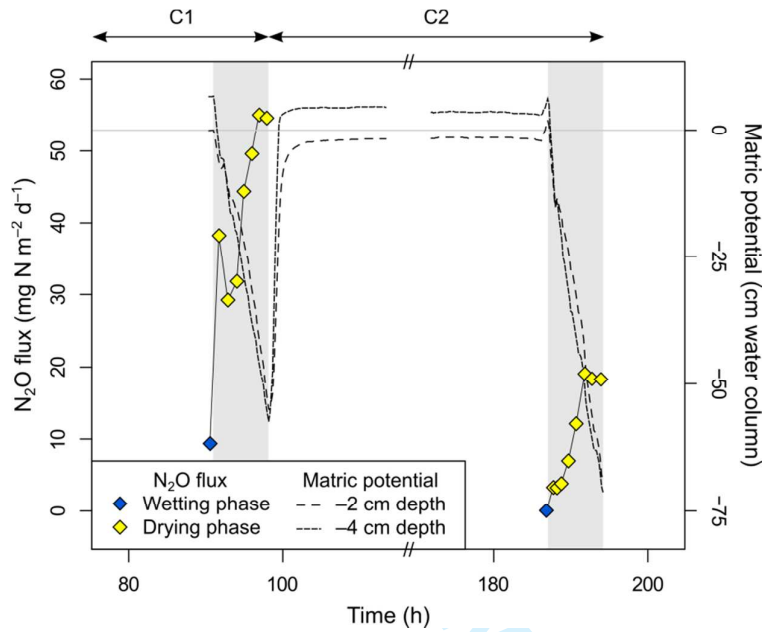
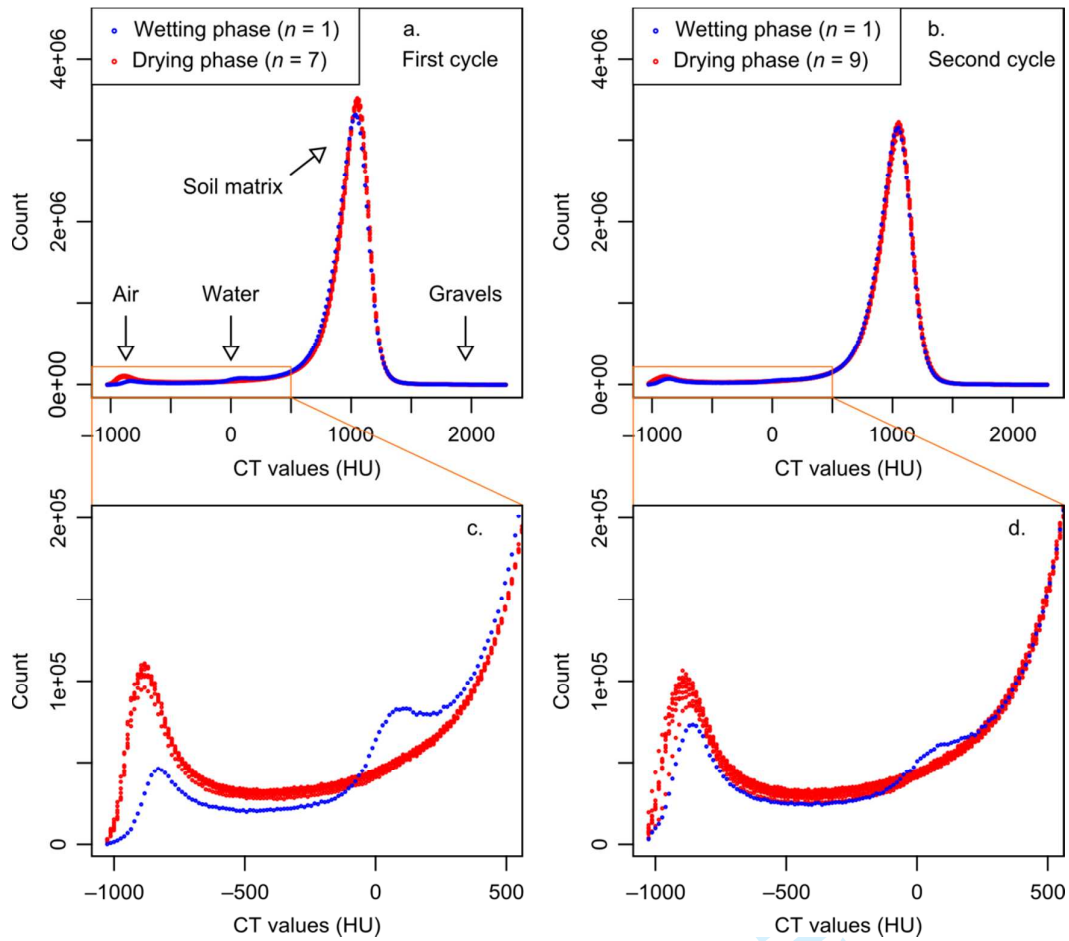
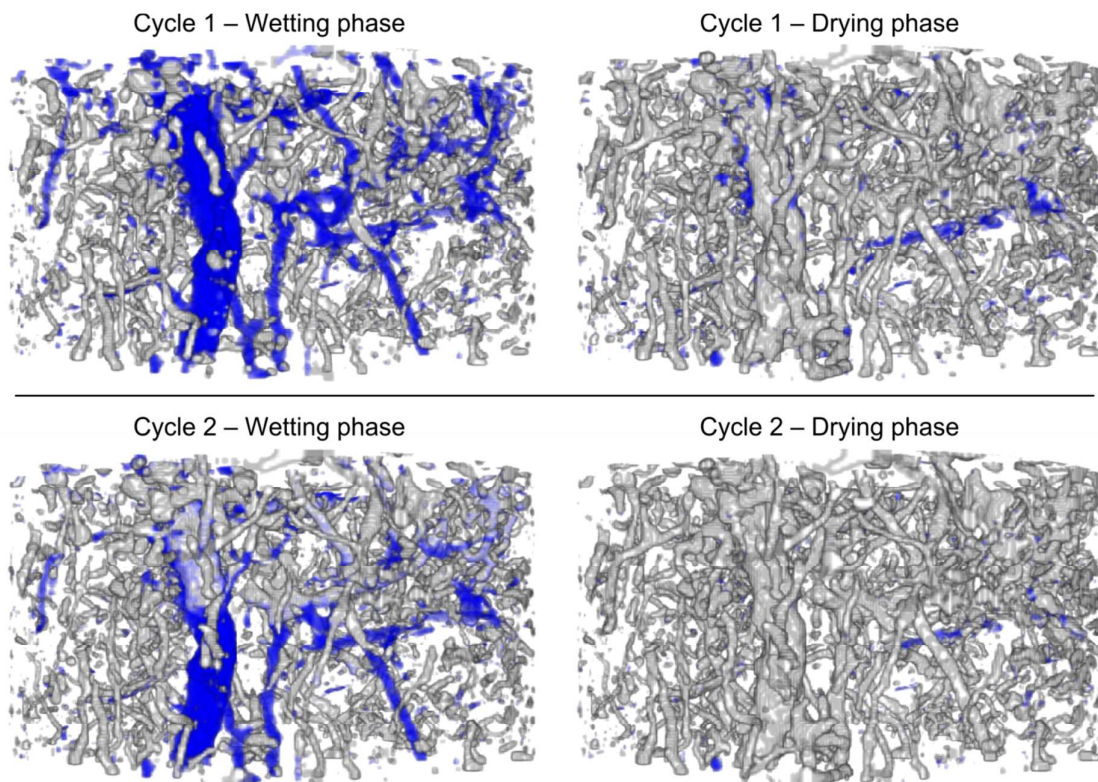


Fig. 3. Evolution with time of the nitrous oxide fluxes and the matric potential measured by the two tensiometers. Gray areas represent the drying phases, and white areas the wetting phases. C1 is the first wetting-drying cycle, and C2 is the second wetting-drying cycle.

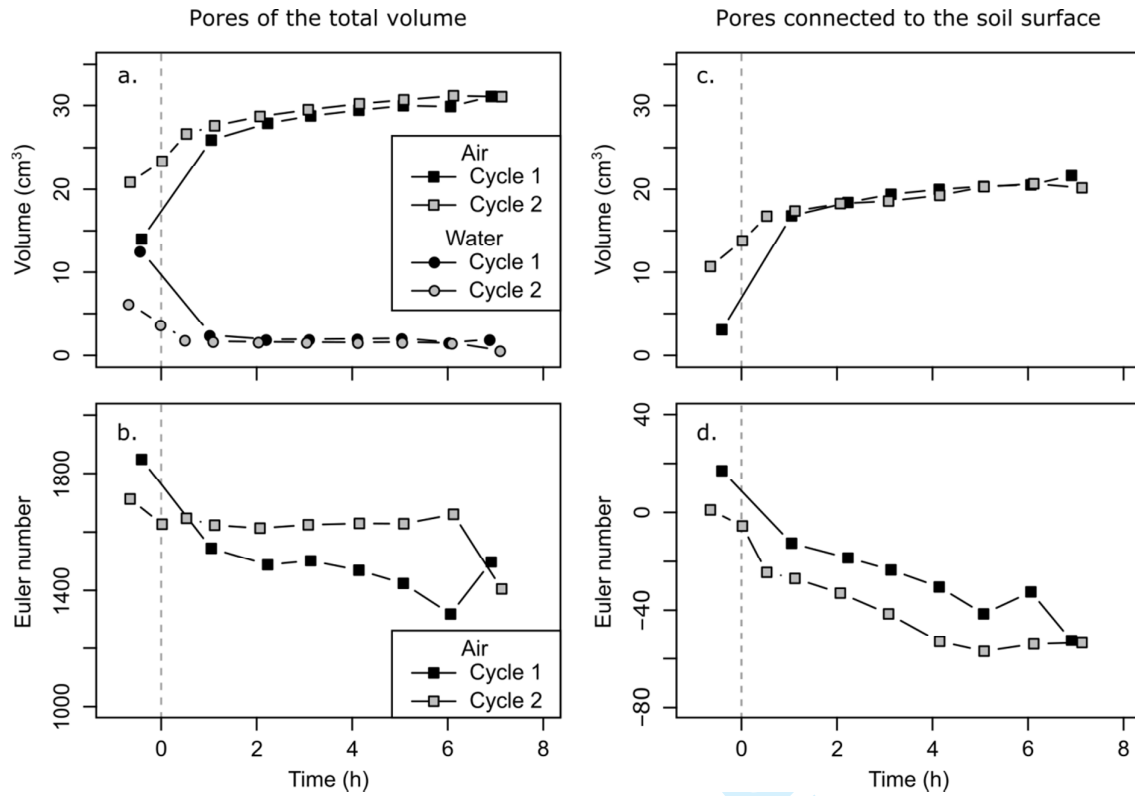




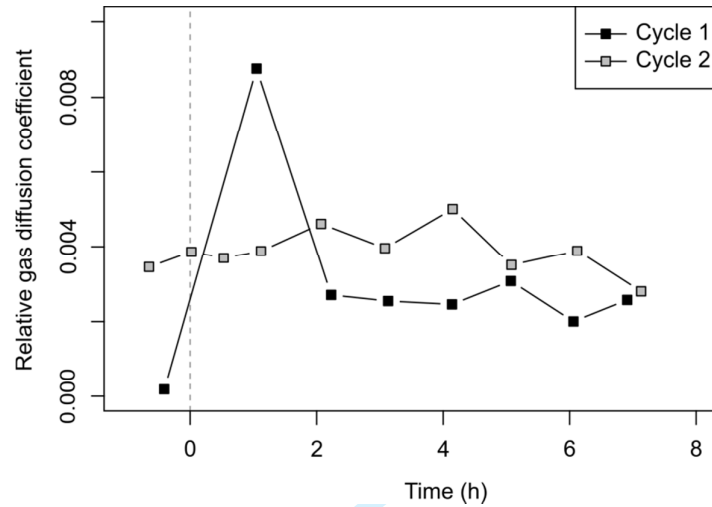
**Fig. 4.** Histograms of intensity values (16-bit), for (a) the first wetting-drying cycle, and (b) the second wetting-drying cycle. Intensity values corresponding to air and water are zoomed in (c) and (d).



**Fig. 5.** Three-dimensional distribution of the air phase (grey) and the water phase (blue) at the end of the wetting phase and at the end of the drying phase for the two wetting-drying cycles.



**Fig. 6.** Evolution with time of (a) the air-filled and water-filled pore volume, and (b) the Euler number of the total pore volume, (c) the air-filled pore volume, and (d) the Euler number of the pores connected to the soil surface, for the first and second wetting-drying cycles. The zero reference time is the beginning of the drying phase.



**Fig. 7.** Evolution with time of the relative gas diffusion coefficient of a 3-cm-thick subsample, for the first and second wetting-drying cycles. The zero reference time is the beginning of the drying phase.