

Geodesics in Margulis spacetimes

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Dedicated to the memory of Dan Rudolph

Abstract. Let M^3 be a Margulis spacetime whose associated complete hyperbolic surface Σ^2 has a compact convex core. Generalizing the correspondence between closed geodesics on M^3 and closed geodesics on Σ^2 , we establish an orbit equivalence between recurrent spacelike geodesics on M^3 and recurrent geodesics on Σ^2 . In contrast, no timelike geodesic recurs in either forward or backward time.

1. Introduction

A Margulis spacetime is a complete flat affine 3-manifold M^3 with free non-abelian fundamental group Γ . It necessarily carries a unique parallel Lorentz metric. Parallelism classes of timelike geodesics form a non-compact complete hyperbolic surface Σ^2 . This complete hyperbolic surface is naturally associated to the flat 3-manifold M^3 and we regard M^3 as an affine deformation of Σ^2 . This paper relates the dynamics of the geodesic flow of the flat affine manifold M^3 to the dynamics of the geodesic flow on the hyperbolic surface Σ^2 .

We restrict ourselves to the case that Σ^2 has compact convex core (that is, Σ^2 has finite type and no cusps). Equivalently, the Fuchsian group Γ_0 corresponding to $\pi_1(\Sigma^2)$ is convex cocompact. In particular, Γ_0 is finitely generated and contains no parabolic elements. Under this assumption, every free homotopy class of an essential closed curve in Σ^2 contains a unique closed geodesic. Since Σ^2 and M^3 are homotopy-equivalent, free homotopy classes of essential closed curves in M correspond to free homotopy classes of essential closed curves in Σ^2 . Every essential closed curve in M^3 is likewise homotopic to a unique closed geodesic in M^3 .

In her thesis [4, 8], Charette studied the next case of dynamical behavior: geodesics spiralling around closed geodesics both in forward and backward time. She proved bispiralling geodesics in M^3 exist, and correspond to bispiralling geodesics in Σ^2 .

This paper extends the above correspondence between geodesics on Σ^2 and M^3 to recurrent geodesics.

A geodesic (either in Σ^2 or in M^3) is *recurrent* if and only if it (together with its velocity vector) is recurrent in *both* directions. These correspond to recurrent points for the corresponding geodesic flows as in Katok and Hasselblatt [17, §3.3]. (Our meaning of the term ‘recurrent’ agrees with the term ‘non-wandering’ used by Eberlein [12].) Under our hypotheses on Σ^2 , a geodesic on Σ^2 is recurrent if and only if the corresponding orbit of the geodesic flow is precompact.

THEOREM 1. *Let M^3 be a Margulis spacetime whose associated complete hyperbolic surface Σ has compact convex core.*

- *The recurrent part of the geodesic flow for Σ^2 is topologically orbit-equivalent to the recurrent spacelike part of the geodesic flow of M^3 .*
- *The set of recurrent spacelike geodesics in a Margulis spacetime is the closure of the set of periodic geodesics.*
- *No timelike geodesic recurs.*

A semiconjugacy between these flows was observed by Fried [13].

This paper is the sequel to [15], which characterizes properness of affine deformations by positivity of a marked Lorentzian length spectrum, the *generalized Margulis invariant*. A crucial step in the proof that properness implies positivity is the construction of sections of the associated flat affine bundle, called *neutralized sections*. A further modification of neutralized sections produces an orbit equivalence between recurrent geodesics in Σ and recurrent geodesics in M .

It follows that the set of recurrent spacelike orbits of the geodesic flow is a Smale hyperbolic set in TM .

Null geodesics not parallel to a point in the limit set Λ of Γ_0 do not recur. In this paper, we do not discuss the recurrence of null geodesics parallel to a point of Λ .

2. Geodesics on affine manifolds

An *affinely flat manifold* is a smooth manifold with a distinguished atlas of local coordinate systems whose charts map to an affine space E such that the coordinate changes are restrictions of affine automorphisms of E . Denote the group of affine automorphisms of E by $\text{Aff}(E)$. This structure is equivalent to a flat torsion-free affine connection. The affine coordinate atlas globalizes to a *developing map*

$$\tilde{M} \xrightarrow{\text{dev}} E,$$

where $\tilde{M} \rightarrow M$ denotes a universal covering space of M . The coordinate changes globalize to an affine holonomy homomorphism

$$\pi_1(M) \xrightarrow{\rho} \text{Aff}(E),$$

where $\pi_1(M)$ denotes the group of deck transformations of $\tilde{M} \rightarrow M$. The developing map is equivariant with respect to ρ .

Denote the vector space of translations $E \rightarrow E$ by V . The action of V by translations on E defines a trivialization of the tangent bundle $TM \cong M \times V$. In these local coordinate charts, a geodesic is a path

$$p \longmapsto p + tV,$$

where $p \in E$ and $v \in V$ is a vector. In terms of the trivialization, the geodesic flow is

$$\begin{aligned} E \times V &\xrightarrow{\tilde{\psi}_t} E \times V, \\ (p, v) &\longmapsto (p + tv, v), \end{aligned}$$

for $t \in \mathbb{R}$. Clearly, this \mathbb{R} -action commutes with $\text{Aff}(E)$.

Geodesic completeness implies that dev is a diffeomorphism. Thus the universal covering \tilde{M} is affinely isomorphic to the affine space E and $M \cong E/\Gamma$, where $\Gamma := \rho(\pi_1(M))$ is a discrete group of affine transformations acting properly and freely on E .

3. Flat Lorentz 3-manifolds

Let $\text{Aff}(E) \xrightarrow{L} \text{GL}(V)$ denote the homomorphism given by the linear part, that is, $L(\gamma) = A$, where

$$p \xrightarrow{\gamma} A(p) + b.$$

The differential of γ at any point p identifies with its linear part $L(\gamma)$ via the identification $TM \cong M \times V$.

Any $L(\Gamma)$ -invariant non-degenerate inner product $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$ on V defines a Γ -invariant flat pseudo-Riemannian structure on E which descends to $M = E/\Gamma$. In particular, affine manifolds with $L(\Gamma) \subset O(n - 1, 1)$ are precisely the flat Lorentzian manifolds, and the underlying affine structures their Levi-Civita connections.

For this reason, we henceforth fix the invariant Lorentzian inner product on V , and hence the (parallel) flat Lorentzian structure on E . The group $\text{Isom}(E)$ of Lorentzian isometries is the semidirect product of the group V of translations of E with the orthogonal group $O(n - 1, 1)$ of linear isometries. The linear part $\text{Isom}(E) \xrightarrow{L} O(n - 1, 1)$ defines the projection homomorphism for the semidirect product. For $l \in \mathbb{R}$, define

$$S_l := \{v \in V \mid \langle v, v \rangle = l\}.$$

When $l > 0$, S_l is a Riemannian submanifold of constant curvature $-l^{-2}$, and when $l < 0$, it is a Lorentzian submanifold of constant curvature l^{-2} . In particular, S_{-1} is a disjoint union of two isometrically embedded copies of hyperbolic $n - 1$ -space H^{n-1} and S_1 is the de Sitter space, a model space of Lorentzian curvature $+1$.

The subset $T_l(M)$ consists of tangent vectors v such that $\langle v, v \rangle = l$ is invariant under the geodesic flow. Indeed, using parallel translation, these bundles trivialize over the universal covering E :

$$T_l(E) \xrightarrow{\cong} E \times S_l.$$

Abels–Margulis–Soifer [2, 3] proved that if a discrete group of Lorentz isometries acts properly on a Minkowski space E , and $L(\Gamma)$ is Zariski dense in $O(n - 1, 1)$, then $n = 3$. Consequently, every complete flat Lorentz manifold is a flat Euclidean affine fibration over a complete flat Lorentz 3-manifold. Thus we henceforth restrict to $n = 3$.

Let M^3 be a complete affinely flat 3-manifold. By Fried and Goldman [14], either Γ is solvable or $L \circ h$ embeds Γ as a discrete subgroup in (a conjugate of) the orthogonal group

$$\text{SO}(2, 1) \subset \text{GL}(3, \mathbb{R}).$$

The cases when Γ is solvable are easily classified (see [14]) and we assume we are in the latter case. In that case, M^3 is a complete flat Lorentz 3-manifold.

In the early 1980s, Margulis, answering a question of Milnor [22], constructed the first examples [19, 20], which are now called *Margulis spacetimes*. Explicit geometric constructions of these manifolds have been given by Drumm [9, 10] and his coauthors [4–7, 11]. For an excellent survey of this subject, see Abels [1].

Since the hyperbolic plane H^2 is the symmetric space of $SO(2, 1)$, Γ acts properly and discretely on H^2 . Since M^3 is aspherical, its fundamental group $\pi_1(M^3) \cong \Gamma$ is torsion-free, so Γ acts freely as well. Therefore the quotient $H^2/L(\Gamma)$ is a complete hyperbolic surface Σ^2 . Furthermore, by Mess [21], Σ is non-compact. (See Goldman and Margulis [16] and Labourie [18] for alternative proofs.) Furthermore, every non-compact complete hyperbolic surface occurs for a Margulis spacetime (Drumm [9]).

The points of Σ^2 correspond to parallelism classes of (unoriented) timelike geodesics on M^3 as follows. It suffices to identify H^2 with the parallelism classes of (unoriented) timelike geodesics in E , equivariantly respecting $\text{Isom}(E) \xrightarrow{L} SO(2, 1)$. The velocity of a unit-speed timelike geodesic in E is a $\tilde{\psi}$ -orbit in

$$T_{-1}E \cong (E \times S_{-1}).$$

The two components of S_{-1} correspond to future-pointing timelike geodesics and past-pointing timelike geodesics respectively. Points in S_{-1} correspond to points in H^2 (the projectivization of S_{-1}) together with an orientation of H^2 . The geodesic flow $\tilde{\psi}$ gives $T_{-1}E$, the structure of a principal \mathbb{R} -bundle over the quotient. The quotient identifies with an affine bundle over $S_{-1} \cong H^2 \times \{\pm 1\}$, whose associated vector bundle is the tangent bundle, as follows: the fiber over the line spanned by a fixed timelike vector v is the affine space quotient of the space of lines parallel to v ; the associated vector space is $V/(v) \cong (v)^\perp$. The tangent space to S_{-1} at v is v^\perp proving the claim.

Passing to the quotient by Γ ,

$$T_{-1}M \cong (E \times H^2)/\Gamma.$$

Since $\Gamma \xrightarrow{L} SO(2, 1)$ is a discrete embedding [14], $SO(2, 1)$ acting properly on H^2 implies that Γ acts properly on H^2 . The Cartesian projection $E \times H^2 \rightarrow H^2$ induces a projection

$$T_{-1}M \longrightarrow H^2/L(\Gamma) = \Sigma,$$

invariant under the restriction of the geodesic flow ψ to $T_{-1}M$, which defines an E -bundle over Σ . Its fiber over the orbit Γv of a fixed future-pointing unit-timelike vector v is the union of geodesics in $M = E/\Gamma$ parallel to Γv . In particular, properness of the $L(\Gamma)$ -action on H^2 implies non-recurrence of timelike geodesics, the last statement in Theorem 1.

More generally, any $L(\Gamma)$ -invariant subset $\Omega \subset V$ defines a subset $T_\Omega(M) \subset TM$ invariant under the geodesic flow. If Ω is an open set upon which $L(\Gamma)$ acts properly, then the geodesic flow defines a proper \mathbb{R} -action on $T_\Omega(M)$. In particular, every geodesic whose velocity lies in Ω is properly immersed and is neither positively nor negatively recurrent.

An important example is the following. The lines in S_0 form the *ideal boundary* (the circle-at-infinity), ∂H^2 , of H^2 . The *limit set* of $L(\Gamma)$ consists of endpoints of recurrent geodesic rays in Σ . Furthermore, $\Lambda_{L(\Gamma)}$ is the unique minimal $L(\Gamma)$ -invariant closed

subset of ∂H^2 . In particular, the set of fixed points of elements of $L(\Gamma)$ is dense in $\Lambda_{L(\Gamma)}$. Moreover, $L(\Gamma)$ acts properly on the complement

$$\Omega := S_0 \setminus \Lambda_{L(\Gamma)}.$$

Applying the above discussion, no geodesic tangent to $T_\Omega(M)$ recurs, that is, a lightlike recurrent geodesic ray must be parallel to $\Lambda_{L(\Gamma)}$.

4. From geodesics in Σ^2 to geodesics in M^3

While timelike directions correspond to points of Σ^2 , spacelike directions correspond to geodesics in H^2 . The recurrent geodesics in Σ intimately relate to the recurrent spacelike geodesics on M^3 .

Denote the set of oriented spacelike geodesics in E by \mathcal{S} . It identifies with the orbit space of the geodesic flow $\tilde{\psi}$ on $T_{+1}E \cong E \times S_{+1}$. The natural map $\mathcal{S} \xrightarrow{\Upsilon} S_{+1}$ associating to a spacelike vector its direction is equivariant with respect to $\text{Isom}(E) \xrightarrow{L} \text{SO}(2, 1)$.

The identity component of $\text{SO}(2, 1)$ simply acts transitively on the unit tangent bundle UH^2 , and therefore we identify $\text{SO}(2, 1)^0$ with UH^2 by choosing a basepoint u_0 in UH^2 . Unit-spacelike vectors in S_{+1} correspond to oriented geodesics in H^2 . Explicitly, if $v \in S_{+1}$, then there is a one-parameter subgroup $a(t) \in \text{SO}(2, 1)$, having v as a fixed vector, and such that

$$\det(v, v^-, v^+) > 0,$$

where v^+ is an expanding eigenvector of $a(t)$ (for $t > 0$) and v^- is the contracting eigenvector. Choose a basepoint $v_0 \in S_{+1}$ corresponding to the orbit of u_0 under the geodesic flow on $U\Sigma$. Geodesics in H^2 relate to spacelike directions by an equivariant mapping

$$\begin{aligned} UH^2 &\longrightarrow S_{+1}, \\ g(u_0) &\longmapsto g(v_0). \end{aligned}$$

The unit tangent bundle $U\Sigma$ of Σ identifies with the quotient

$$L(\Gamma) \backslash UH^2 \cong L(\Gamma) \backslash \text{SO}(2, 1)^0,$$

where the geodesic flow ψ corresponds to the right-action of $a(-t)$ (see, for example, [15, §1.2]).

Observe that a geodesic in Σ^2 is recurrent if and only if the endpoints of any of its lifts to $\tilde{\Sigma} \approx H^2$ lie in the limit set $\Lambda_{L(\Gamma)}$ of $L(\Gamma)$. If the convex core of Σ^2 is compact, then the union $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$ of recurrent ϕ -orbits is compact.

LEMMA 2. *There exists an orbit-preserving map*

$$U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma \xrightarrow{\hat{N}} T_{+1}(M)$$

mapping ϕ -orbits injectively to recurrent ψ -orbits.

Proof. The associated flat affine bundle \mathbb{E}_Γ over $U\Sigma$ associated to the affine deformation Γ is defined as follows. The affine representation of Γ defines a diagonal action of Γ

on $\widetilde{U\Sigma} \times E$. Its total space is the quotient of the product $\widetilde{U\Sigma} \times E$ by the diagonal action of $\pi_1(U\Sigma)$:

$$\pi_1(U\Sigma) \longrightarrow \pi_1(\Sigma) \longrightarrow \text{Isom}(E).$$

Similarly, the flat vector bundle V_Γ over $U\Sigma$ is the quotient of $\widetilde{U\Sigma} \times V$ by the diagonal action

$$\pi_1(U\Sigma) \longrightarrow \pi_1(\Sigma) \longrightarrow \text{Isom}(E) \xrightarrow{L} \text{SO}(2, 1).$$

According to [15], the *neutral section* of V_Γ is a $\text{SO}(2, 1)$ -invariant section which is parallel with respect to the geodesic flow on $U\Sigma$, and arises from the graph of the $\text{SO}(2, 1)$ -equivariant map

$$U\widetilde{\Sigma} \cong UH^2 \longrightarrow V$$

with image S_{+1} , the space of unit-spacelike vectors in V .

Here is the main construction of [15]. To every section σ of \mathbb{E}_Γ continuously differentiable along ϕ , associate the function

$$F_\sigma := \langle \nabla_\phi \sigma, \nu \rangle$$

on $U\Sigma$. (Here the covariant derivative of a section of \mathbb{E}_Γ along a vector field ϕ in the base is a section of the associated vector bundle V_Γ .) Different choices of section σ yield cohomologous functions F_σ . (Recall that two functions f_1, f_2 are *cohomologous*, written $f_1 \sim f_2$, if

$$f_1 - f_2 = \phi g$$

for a function g which is differentiable with respect to the vector field ϕ [17, §2.2]).

Restrict the affine bundle \mathbb{E}_Γ to $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$. Goldman *et al* [15, Lemma 8.4] guarantees the existence of a *neutralized section*, that is, a section N of $(\mathbb{E}_\Gamma)|_{U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma}$ satisfying

$$\nabla_\phi N = f\nu,$$

for some function f .

Although the following lemma is well known, we could not find a proof in the literature. For completeness, we supply a proof in the appendix. □

LEMMA 3. *Let X be a compact space equipped with a flow ϕ . Let $f \in C(X)$, such that, for all ϕ -invariant measures μ on X ,*

$$\int f d\mu > 0.$$

Then f is cohomologous to a positive function.

Since Γ acts properly, [15, Proposition 8.1] implies that $\int F_\sigma d\mu \neq 0$ for all ϕ -invariant probability measures μ on $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$. Since the set of invariant measures is connected, $\int F_\sigma d\mu$ is either positive for all ϕ -invariant probability measures μ on $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$ or negative for all ϕ -invariant probability measures μ on $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$. Conjugating by $-I$ if necessary, we may assume that $\int F_\sigma d\mu > 0$. Lemma 3 implies $F_\sigma + \phi g > 0$ for some function g . Write

$$\widehat{N} = N + g\nu.$$

\widehat{N} remains neutralized, and $\nabla_\phi \widehat{N}$ vanishes nowhere.

Let $\widetilde{U}_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$ be the preimage of $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$ in UH^2 . Then \widehat{N} determines a Γ -equivariant map

$$\widetilde{U}_{\text{rec}}\Sigma \xrightarrow{\widehat{N}} E.$$

Each $\widetilde{\phi}$ -orbit injectively maps to a spacelike geodesic. The map

$$\begin{aligned} U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma &\xrightarrow{\widehat{N}} (E \times S_{+1})/\Gamma, \\ x &\mapsto [(\widehat{N}(x), v(x))] \end{aligned}$$

is the desired orbit equivalence $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma \rightarrow T_{+1}(M)$.

LEMMA 4. *Any spacelike recurrent geodesic parallel to a geodesic γ in the image of \widehat{N} coincides with γ .*

Proof. Let $t \xrightarrow{g} \phi_t(v)$ be an orbit in $U_{\text{rec}}\Sigma$. A geodesic ξ parallel to $\widehat{N}(g)$ determines a parallel section u of V along g . Since g recurs, the resulting parallel section is a bounded invariant parallel section along the closure of g . By the Anosov property, such a section is along v , and, therefore, up to reparametrization, $\gamma = \widehat{N}(g)$. \square

PROPOSITION 5. *\widehat{N} is injective and its image is the set of recurrent spacelike geodesics.*

Proof. An orbit of the geodesic flow ϕ recurs if and only if the corresponding Γ -orbit in the space \mathcal{S} of spacelike geodesics in E recurs. Similarly a ϕ -orbit in $T_{+1}(M)$ recurs if and only if the corresponding $L(\Gamma)$ -orbit in S_{+1} recurs. The map $\mathcal{S} \xrightarrow{\Upsilon} S_{+1}$ recording the direction of a spacelike geodesic is L -equivariant. If the Γ -orbit of $g \in \mathcal{S}$ corresponds to a recurrent spacelike geodesic in M , then the $L(\Gamma)$ -orbit of $\Upsilon(g)$ corresponds to a recurrent ϕ -orbit in $U\Sigma$.

\widehat{N} is injective along orbits of the geodesic flow. Thus it suffices to prove that the restriction of Υ to the subset of Γ -recurrent geodesics in \mathcal{S} is injective. Since the fibers of Υ are parallelism classes of spacelike geodesics, Lemma 4 implies injectivity of \widehat{N} .

Finally, let g be a ψ -recurrent point in $T_{+1}(M)$, corresponding to a spacelike recurrent geodesic γ in M . It corresponds to a recurrent Γ -orbit Γg in \mathcal{S} . Then $\Upsilon(\Gamma g)$ is a recurrent $L(\Gamma)$ -orbit in S_{+1} , and corresponds to a recurrent ϕ -orbit in $U\Sigma$. The image of this ϕ -orbit under \widehat{N} is a spacelike recurrent geodesic in $T_{+1}(M)$ parallel to γ . Now apply Lemma 4 again to conclude that g lies in the image of \widehat{N} . \square

The proof of Theorem 1 is complete.

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A. Appendix. Cohomology and positive functions

Let X be a smooth manifold equipped with a smooth flow ϕ . A function $g \in C(X)$ is continuously differentiable along ϕ if, for each $x \in X$, the function

$$t \mapsto g(\phi_t(x))$$

is a continuously differentiable map $\mathbb{R} \rightarrow X$. Denote the subspace of $C(X)$ consisting of functions continuously differentiable along ϕ by $C_\phi(X)$. For $g \in C_\phi(X)$, denote its directional derivative by

$$\phi(g) := \left. \frac{d}{dt} \right|_{t=0} g \circ \phi_t.$$

The proof of Lemma 3 will be based on two lemmas.

LEMMA A.1. *Let $f \in C_\phi(X)$. For any $T > 0$, define*

$$f_T(x) := \frac{1}{T} \int_0^T f(\phi_s(x)) ds.$$

Then $f \sim f_T$.

Proof. We must show that there exists a function $g \in C_\phi(X)$ such that

$$f_T - f = \phi g.$$

By the fundamental theorem of calculus,

$$f \circ \phi_t = f + \int_0^t (\phi f \circ \phi_s) ds.$$

Writing

$$g = \frac{1}{T} \int_0^T \int_0^t (f \circ \phi_s) ds dt,$$

then

$$\begin{aligned} f_T - f &= \frac{1}{T} \int_0^T (f \circ \phi_t - f) dt \\ &= \frac{1}{T} \int_0^T \int_0^t \phi(f \circ \phi_s) ds dt \\ &= \phi g. \end{aligned}$$

as desired. □

LEMMA A.2. *Assume that for all ϕ -invariant measures μ ,*

$$\int f d\mu > 0.$$

Then $f_T > 0$ for some $T > 0$.

Proof. Otherwise, sequences $\{T_m\}_{m \in \widehat{\mathbb{N}}}$ of positive real numbers and sequences $\{x_m\}_{m \in \widehat{\mathbb{N}}}$ of points in M exist such that

$$f_{T_m}(x_m) \leq 0.$$

Using the flow ϕ_t , push forward the (normalized) Lebesgue measure

$$\frac{1}{T_m} \mu_{[0, T_m]}$$

on the interval $[0, T_m]$ to X , to obtain a sequence of probability measures μ_n on X such that

$$\int f d\mu_n \leq 0.$$

As in [15, §7], a subsequence weakly converges to a ϕ -invariant measure μ for which

$$\int f d\mu \leq 0,$$

contradicting our hypotheses. \square

Proof of Lemma 3. By Lemma A.1, $f \sim f_T$ for any $T > 0$, and Lemma A.2 implies that $f_T > 0$ for some T . \square

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