

quatrième série - tome 49 fascicule 1 janvier-février 2016

*ANNALES
SCIENTIFIQUES
de
L'ÉCOLE
NORMALE
SUPÉRIEURE*

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*Geometry and topology of complete Lorentz spacetimes
of constant curvature*

SOCIÉTÉ MATHÉMATIQUE DE FRANCE

Annales Scientifiques de l'École Normale Supérieure

Publiées avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

Responsable du comité de rédaction / *Editor-in-chief*

Antoine CHAMBERT-LOIR

Publication fondée en 1864 par Louis Pasteur

Continuée de 1872 à 1882 par H. SAINTE-CLAIRE DEVILLE
de 1883 à 1888 par H. DEBRAY
de 1889 à 1900 par C. HERMITE
de 1901 à 1917 par G. DARBOUX
de 1918 à 1941 par É. PICARD
de 1942 à 1967 par P. MONTEL

Comité de rédaction au 1^{er} janvier 2016

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Édition / *Publication*

Société Mathématique de France
Institut Henri Poincaré
11, rue Pierre et Marie Curie
75231 Paris Cedex 05
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Fax : (33) 01 40 46 90 96

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13288 Marseille Cedex 09
Fax : (33) 04 91 41 17 51
email : smf@smf.univ-mrs.fr

Tarifs

Europe : 515 €. Hors Europe : 545 €. Vente au numéro : 77 €.

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ISSN 0012-9593

Directeur de la publication : Marc Peigné
Périodicité : 6 n^{os} / an

GEOMETRY AND TOPOLOGY OF COMPLETE LORENTZ SPACETIMES OF CONSTANT CURVATURE

BY JEFFREY DANCIGER, FRANÇOIS GUÉRITAUD
AND FANNY KASSEL

ABSTRACT. — We study proper, isometric actions of non virtually solvable discrete groups Γ on the 3-dimensional Minkowski space $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$, viewing them as limits of actions on the 3-dimensional anti-de Sitter space AdS^3 . To each such action on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ is associated an infinitesimal deformation, inside $\text{SO}(2, 1)$, of the fundamental group of a hyperbolic surface S . When S is convex cocompact, we prove that Γ acts properly on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ if and only if this group-level deformation is realized by a deformation of S that uniformly contracts or uniformly expands all distances. We give two applications in this case. (1) Tameness: A complete flat spacetime is homeomorphic to the interior of a compact manifold with boundary. (2) Geometric transition: A complete flat spacetime is the rescaled limit of collapsing AdS spacetimes.

RÉSUMÉ. — Nous étudions les actions propres, par isométries, de groupes discrets non virtuellement résolubles Γ sur l'espace de Minkowski $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$, en les voyant comme limites d'actions sur l'espace anti-de Sitter AdS^3 . À une telle action sur $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ est associée une déformation infinitésimale, dans $\text{SO}(2, 1)$, du groupe fondamental d'une surface hyperbolique S . Lorsque S est convexe cocompacte, nous montrons que Γ agit proprement sur $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ si et seulement si cette déformation au niveau du groupe est réalisée par une déformation de S qui contracte uniformément ou dilate uniformément toutes les distances. Nous donnons deux applications dans ce cas. (1) Sagesse topologique : un espace-temps plat complet est homéomorphe à l'intérieur d'une variété compacte à bord. (2) Transition géométrique : un espace-temps plat complet est la limite renormalisée d'espaces-temps AdS qui dégénèrent.

1. Introduction

A Lorentzian 3-manifold of constant negative curvature is locally modeled on the *anti-de Sitter* space $\text{AdS}^3 = \text{PO}(2, 2)/\text{O}(2, 1)$, which can be realized in \mathbb{RP}^3 as the set of negative points with respect to a quadratic form of signature $(2, 2)$. A flat Lorentzian 3-manifold is locally modeled on the *Minkowski* space $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$, which is the affine space \mathbb{R}^3 endowed with

J.D. was partially supported by the National Science Foundation under the grant DMS 1103939. F.G. and F.K. were partially supported by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche under the grants DiscGroup (ANR-11-BS01-013) and ETTT (ANR-09-BLAN-0116-01), and through the Labex CEMPI (ANR-11-LABX-0007-01).

the Lorentzian structure induced by a quadratic form of signature $(2, 1)$. Observe that the tangent space at a point of AdS^3 identifies with $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$; this basic fact motivates the point of view of this paper that a large class of manifolds modeled on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ (convex cocompact Margulis spacetimes) are infinitesimal versions of manifolds modeled on AdS^3 . We consider only *complete* Lorentzian manifolds which are quotients of AdS^3 or $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ by discrete groups Γ of isometries acting properly discontinuously.

The following facts, specific to dimension 3, will be used throughout the paper. The anti-de Sitter space AdS^3 identifies with the manifold $G = \text{PSL}_2(\mathbb{R})$ endowed with the Lorentzian metric induced by (a multiple of) the Killing form. The group of orientation and time-orientation preserving isometries is $G \times G$ acting by right and left multiplication: $(g_1, g_2) \cdot g = g_2 g g_1^{-1}$. The Minkowski space $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ can be realized as the Lie algebra $\mathfrak{g} = \mathfrak{sl}_2(\mathbb{R})$. The group of orientation and time-orientation preserving isometries is $G \ltimes \mathfrak{g}$ acting affinely: $(g, v) \cdot w = \text{Ad}(g)w + v$.

Examples of groups of isometries acting properly discontinuously on AdS^3 are easy to construct: one can take $\Gamma = \Gamma_0 \times \{1\}$ where Γ_0 is any discrete subgroup of G ; in this case the quotient $\Gamma \backslash \text{AdS}^3$ identifies with the unit tangent bundle to the hyperbolic orbifold $\Gamma_0 \backslash \mathbb{H}^2$. Such quotients are called *standard*. Goldman [18] produced the first nonstandard examples by deforming standard ones, a technique that was later generalized by Kobayashi [30]. Salein [38] constructed the first examples that were not deformations of standard ones.

On the other hand, although cyclic examples are readily constructed, it is not obvious that there exist *non-solvable* groups acting properly discontinuously on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$. The Auslander conjecture in dimension 3, proved by Fried-Goldman [17], states that any discrete group acting properly discontinuously *and cocompactly* on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ is solvable up to finite index, generalizing Bieberbach's theory of crystallographic groups. Milnor [36] asked if the cocompactness assumption could be removed. This was answered negatively by Margulis [33, 34], who constructed the first examples of nonabelian free groups acting properly discontinuously on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ (see [14] for another proof); the quotient manifolds coming from such actions are now often called *Margulis spacetimes*. Drumm [12, 13] constructed more examples of Margulis spacetimes by introducing polyhedral surfaces called *crooked planes* to produce fundamental domains.

1.1. Proper actions and contraction

A discrete group Γ acting on AdS^3 by isometries that preserve both orientation and time orientation is determined by two representations $j, \rho : \Gamma \rightarrow G = \text{PSL}_2(\mathbb{R})$, the *first projection* and *second projection*. We refer to the group of isometries determined by (j, ρ) using the notation $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$. By work of Kulkarni-Raymond [31], if such a group $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$ acts properly on AdS^3 and is torsion-free, then one of the representations j, ρ must be injective and discrete; if Γ is finitely generated (which we shall always assume), then we may pass to a finite-index subgroup that is torsion-free by the Selberg lemma [40, Lem. 8]. We assume then that j is injective and discrete. When j is convex cocompact, Kassel [27] gave a full characterization of properness of the action of $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$ in terms of a double contraction condition. Specifically, $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$ acts properly on AdS^3 if and only if either of the following two equivalent conditions holds (up to switching j and ρ if both are convex cocompact):

- (*Lipschitz contraction*) There exists a (j, ρ) -equivariant Lipschitz map $f : \mathbb{H}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{H}^2$ with Lipschitz constant < 1 ;
- (*Length contraction*)

$$(1.1) \quad \sup_{\gamma \in \Gamma \text{ with } \lambda(j(\gamma)) > 0} \frac{\lambda(\rho(\gamma))}{\lambda(j(\gamma))} < 1,$$

where $\lambda(g)$ is the hyperbolic translation length of $g \in G$ (defined to be 0 if g is not hyperbolic, see (2.1)). This was extended by Guéritaud-Kassel [23] to the case that the finitely generated group $j(\Gamma)$ is allowed to have parabolic elements. The two (equivalent) types of contraction appearing above are easy to illustrate in the case when ρ is also discrete and injective: the Lipschitz contraction criterion says that there exists a map $j(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2 \rightarrow \rho(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2$ (in the correct homotopy class) that uniformly contracts all distances on the surface, while the length contraction criterion says that any closed geodesic on $\rho(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2$ is uniformly shorter than the corresponding geodesic on $j(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2$. Lipschitz contraction easily implies length contraction, but the converse is not obvious. One important consequence that can be deduced from either criterion is that for a fixed convex cocompact j , the representations ρ that yield a proper action form an open set. In Section 6 (which can be read independently), we derive topological and geometric information about the quotient manifold directly from the Lipschitz contraction property.

We remark that $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$ does not act properly on AdS^3 in the case that Γ is a closed surface group and j, ρ are both Fuchsian (i.e., injective and discrete). For Thurston showed, as part of his theory of the asymmetric metric on Teichmüller space [42], that the best Lipschitz constant of maps $j(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2 \rightarrow \rho(\Gamma) \backslash \mathbb{H}^2$ (in the correct homotopy class) is ≥ 1 , with equality only if ρ is conjugate to j . However, $\Gamma^{j, \rho}$ does act properly on a convex subdomain of AdS^3 ; the resulting AdS manifolds are the globally hyperbolic spacetimes studied by Mess [35].

We now turn to the flat case. A discrete group Γ acting on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ by isometries that preserve both orientation and time orientation is determined by a representation $j : \Gamma \rightarrow \text{PSL}_2(\mathbb{R})$ and a j -cocycle $u : \Gamma \rightarrow \mathfrak{sl}_2(\mathbb{R})$, i.e., a map satisfying

$$u(\gamma_1 \gamma_2) = u(\gamma_1) + \text{Ad}(j(\gamma_1)) u(\gamma_2)$$

for all $\gamma_1, \gamma_2 \in \Gamma$. We refer to the group of isometries determined by (j, u) using the notation $\Gamma^{j, u}$, where j gives the *linear part* and u the *translational part* of $\Gamma^{j, u}$. The cocycle u may be thought of as an infinitesimal deformation of j (see Section 2.3). Fried-Goldman [17] showed that if Γ acts properly on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ and is not virtually solvable, then j must be injective and discrete on a finite-index subgroup of Γ ; in particular $j(\Gamma)$ is the fundamental group of a hyperbolic surface S (up to finite index). Unlike in the AdS case, here S cannot be compact (see Mess [35]). In the case that it is convex cocompact, Goldman-Labourie-Margulis [20] gave a properness criterion in terms of the so-called *Margulis invariant*. Given the interpretation of this invariant as a derivative of translation lengths [22], the group $\Gamma^{j, u}$ (with j convex cocompact) acts properly on $\mathbb{R}^{2,1}$ if and only if, up to replacing u by $-u$, the infinitesimal deformation u contracts the lengths of all closed geodesics on S at a uniform rate:

$$(1.2) \quad \sup_{\gamma \in \Gamma \text{ with } \lambda(j(\gamma)) > 0} \frac{d}{dt} \Big|_{t=0} \frac{\lambda(e^{tu(\gamma)} j(\gamma))}{\lambda(j(\gamma))} < 0.$$