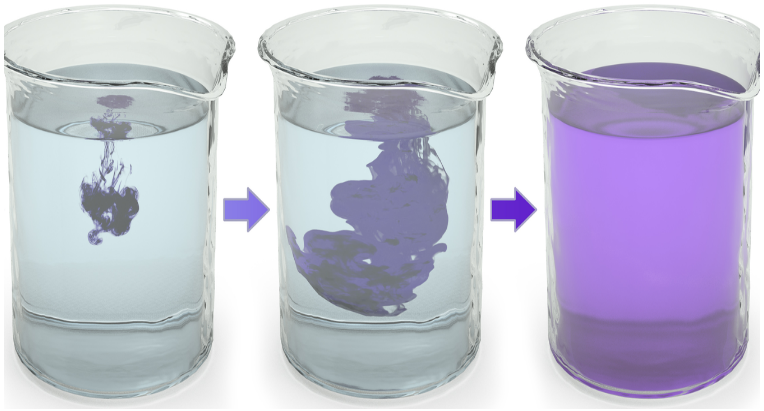
BÁLINT TÓTH
(Alfréd Rényi Mathematical Institute Budapest)

DIFFUSION IN THE RANDOM LORENTZ GAS

Probability Colloquium
Athens, 2026-05-02

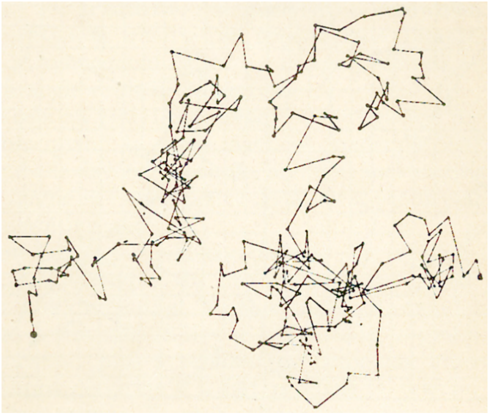
Goal:
Understand mathematically physical diffusion.

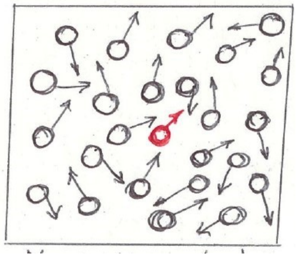
Macro: mass/bulk diffusion



[Wikipedia/public]

Micro: tracer/self-diffusion





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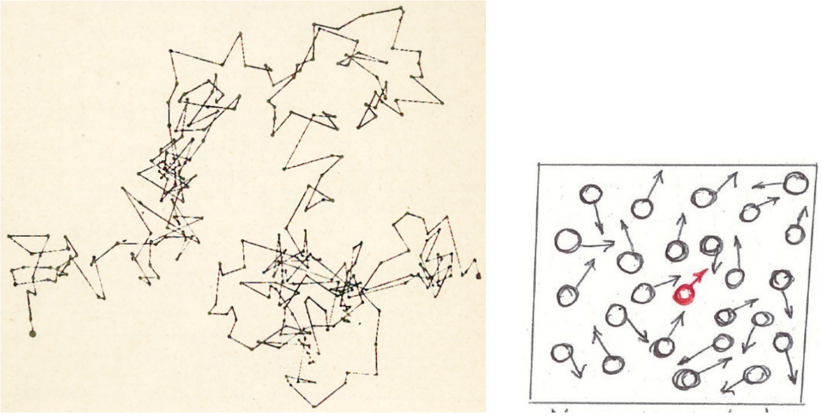


[J Perrin, Les atomes, 1910]

. . . the bottomless well of the past . . .

Empirical:

. . . [Lucretius (∼60 BC)] . . . [J Ingenhousz (1785)] . . .

. . . [R Brown (1827)] . . .

Theoretical:

. . . [A Fick (1855)] . . . [A Einstein (1905)] . . .

. . . [C Pearson & Lord Rayleigh (1905)] . . .

. . . [M Smoluchowski (1906)] . . . [P Langevin (1908)] . . .

. . . [J Perrin (1910)] . . .

Mathematical:

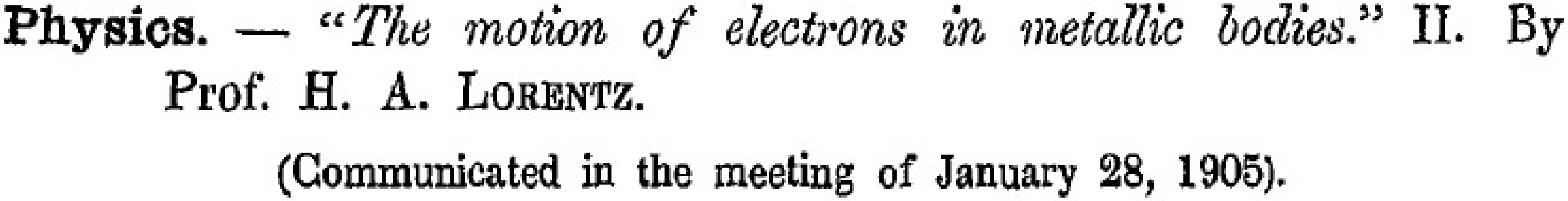
. . . [J Bernoulli (1713)] . . . [A de Moivre (1711-1738)] . . .

. . . [PS Laplace (....-1812)] . . . [A Lyapunov (1901)] . . .

. . . [G Pólya (1922)] . . . [N Wiener (1920-1933)] . . .

. . . [P Lévy (1920-1940)] . . . [M Kac (1946-....)] . . .

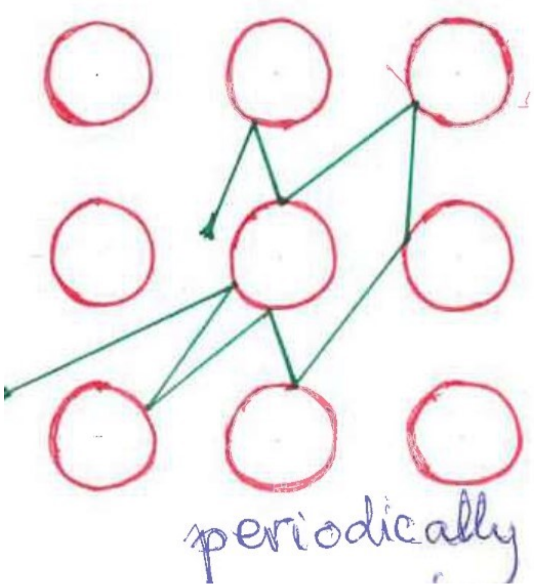
The Lorentz / Ehrenfest Gas - genesis



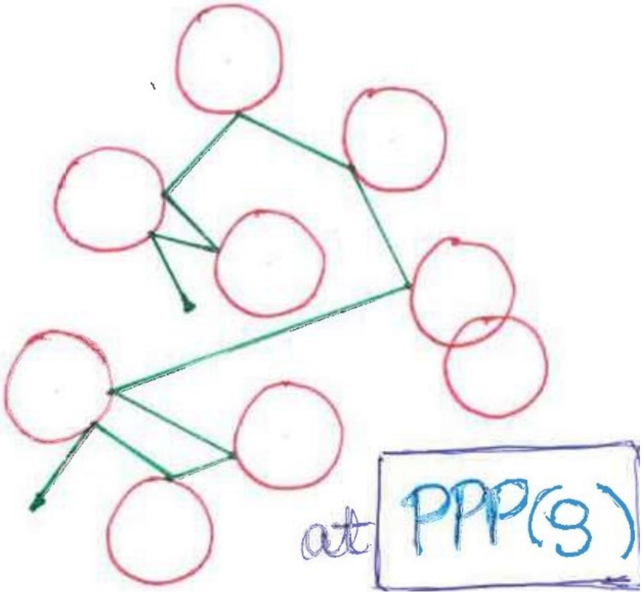
Physics. — *"The motion of electrons in metallic bodies."* II. By Prof. H. A. LORENTZ.

(Communicated in the meeting of January 28, 1905).

Periodic



Random



Detour:

Tatyana Afanasieva
(1876-1964)

Paul Ehrenfest
(1880-1933)

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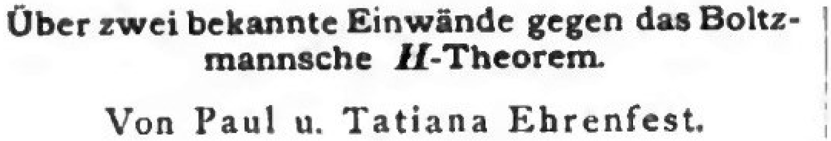
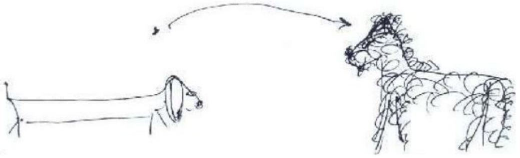
1907:



Über zwei bekannte Einwände gegen das Boltzmannsche H-Theorem.

Von Paul u. Tatiana Ehrenfest.



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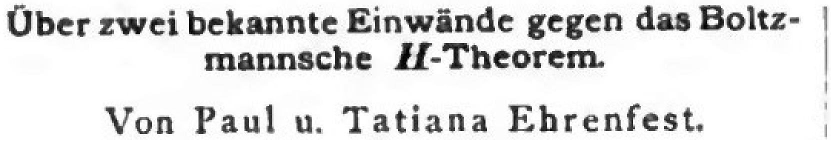

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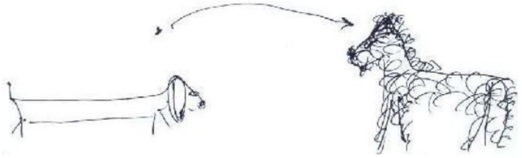

Genesis of Markov Chains: . . . ,

AA Markov (1906), EH Bruns (1906),

P&T Ehrenfest (1907), O Perron (1907),

G Frobenius (1908), . . .

Detour:

Tatyana Afanasieva (1876-1964)

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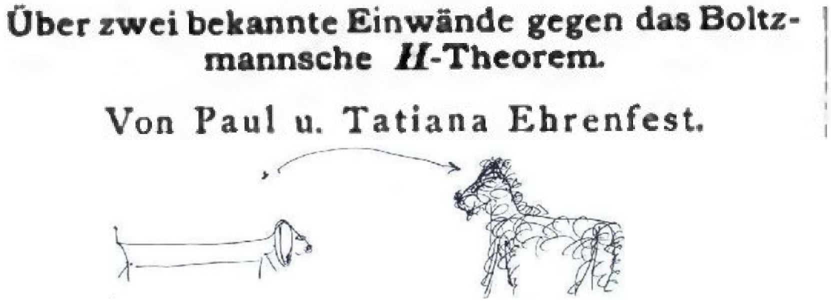

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1911:

IV 32. BEGRIFFLICHE GRUNDLAGEN
DER STATISTISCHEN AUFFASSUNG IN DER
MECHANIK.

Von

P. u. T. EHRENFEST*)

IN ST. PETERSBURG.

In: F Klein (ed): *Encyklopädie der math. Wissenschaften* vol. 4-4

extended book in 1912

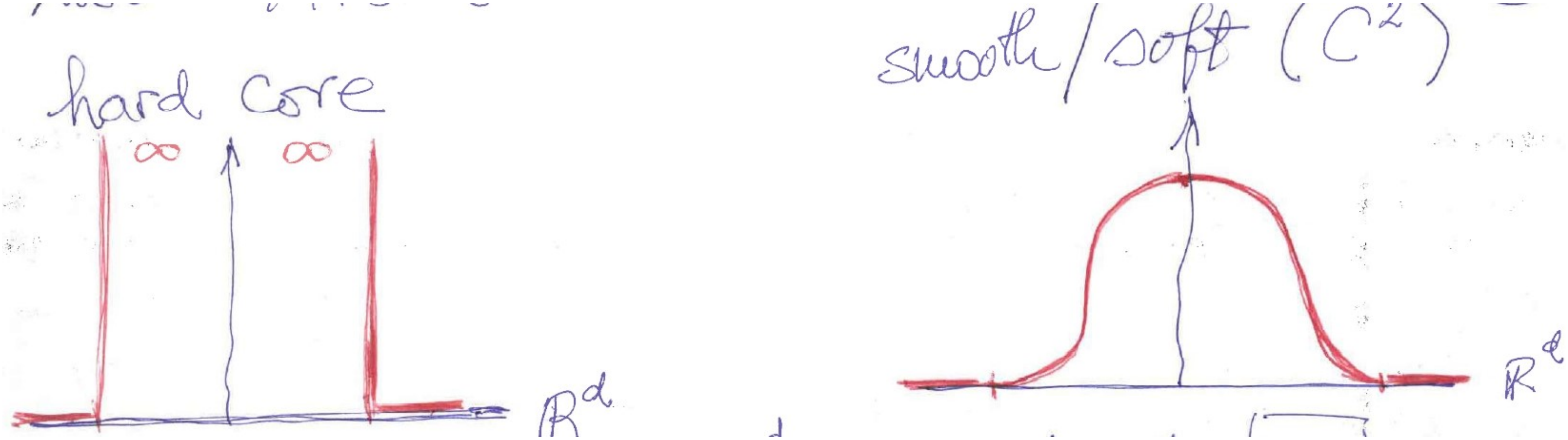
The random Lorentz gas:

Ingredients:

- A spherically symmetric finite range potential:

$$\varphi : \mathbb{R}^d \mapsto \mathbb{R} \cup \{+\infty\}, \qquad \varphi(x) = \varphi(|x|e) = \varphi(x)\mathbb{1}_{\{|x| \le r\}}$$

two extremes:



- A PPP ω in $\mathbb{R}^d \setminus \{x : |x| \le r\}$, of density ϱ.
  Points $q \in \omega$ will be the centres of fixed (∞-mass) scatterers.

The Lorentz/Ehrenfest trajectory: Particle of mass 1 moves among the fixed scatterers, according to Newtonian dynamics $t \mapsto (V(t)), X(t))$, with i.c. $X(0) = 0 \in \mathbb{R}^d$, $V(0) \in \mathbb{S}^{d-1}$.

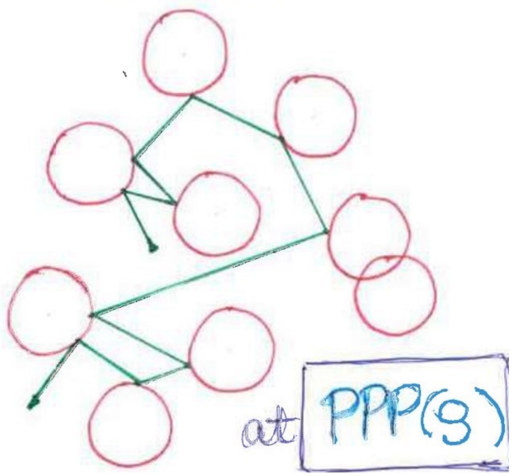
In the **soft** case:

$$\Phi(x) := \sum_{q\in\omega} \varphi(x-q), \qquad F(x) = -\nabla\Phi(x) = -\sum_{q\in\omega} \nabla\varphi(x-q)$$

$$\dot{V}(t) = F(X(t)), \qquad \dot{X}(t) = V(t), \qquad + \text{i.c.}$$

In the **hard core** case: the ODE is formal, nevertheless the dynamics is still well defined

Comment on **no trapping**:
h.c.: $r^d\varrho < \theta_c$,
s.c.: $\max|\varphi| < m_c(r^d\varrho)$.



Sources of randomness:

- environment: random placement of scatterers, $\omega \sim \mathsf{PPP}(\varrho)$.
- random direction of initial velocity, e.g., $V(0) \sim \mathtt{UNI}(\mathbb{S}^{\mathrm{d}})$.

and **nothing more**. Dynamics: fully deterministic, Newtonian.

Wanted: $t \gg 1$ scaling behaviour of the trajectory $t \mapsto (V(t), X(t))$

Holy Grail: $\textbf{?}\ T^{-1/2} X(Tt) \Rightarrow W(t)\ \textbf{?}$

(conditioned on no trapping)

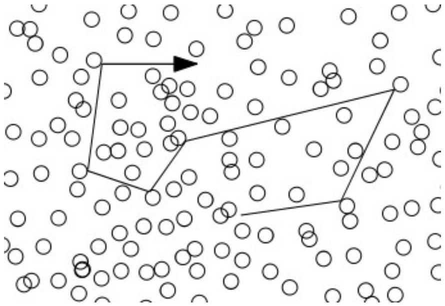
Comment on periodic LG (detour): Factor to cell with periodic b.c.: Sinai billiard = hyperbolic dynamics on compact state space. Big Theory, great results since 1980.

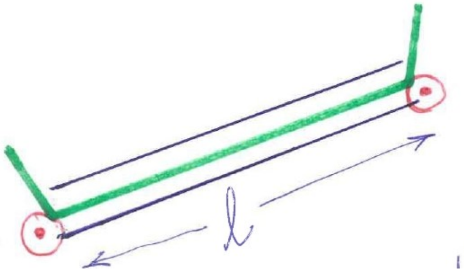
[Bunimovich-Sinai (1980)] $d = 2$ . . .

[Chernov-Dolgopyat (2009)] $d = 3$ (conditional) . . .

Kinetic limits I. Boltzmann-Grad:

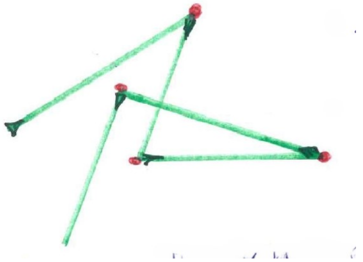
$$\varrho = \varepsilon^{-d}, \qquad r = \varepsilon^{d/(d-1)}, \qquad \underbrace{\varrho r^d = \varepsilon^{d/(d-1)}}_{\text{low density}}$$





The free flight between successive scatterings $\ell \sim \texttt{EXP}(1)$

Easy to guess what happens in the BG-limit, as $\varepsilon \to 0$



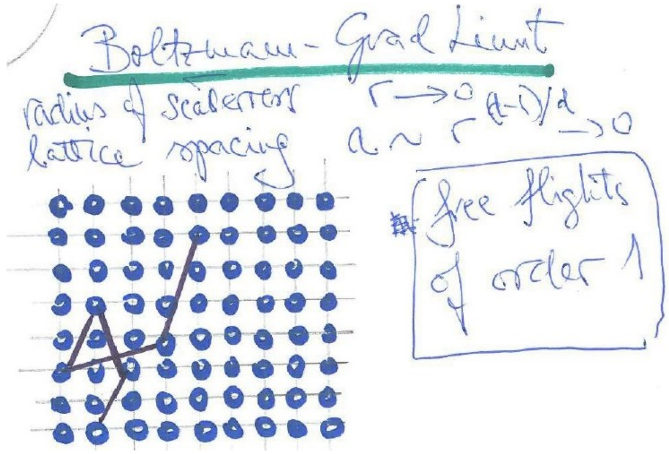
Flight process

- i.i.d $\texttt{EXP}(1)$ flights
- Markovian scatt. with differential cross section $\sigma(v, v') \sim |v - v'|^{3-d}$

Hard to prove.

[G Gallavotti (1970)]
[H Spohn (1978)]
[C Boldrighini, L Bunimovich, YaG Sinai (1982)]

Comment on periodic LG (detour):



[E Caglioti, F Golse (2008)],

. . . ,

[J Marklof, A Strömbergsson (2011)]

The BG-limit: $t \mapsto Y(t)$ a "hidden Markov" flight process with heavy tailed flights.

Kinetic limits II. Weak Coupling:

$$\varrho = \varepsilon^{-d}, \qquad r = \varepsilon, \qquad \underbrace{\text{intensity of potential} \sim \varepsilon^{1/2}}_{\text{weak coupling}}$$

$$\Phi_\varepsilon(x) := \varepsilon^{1/2} \sum_{q \in \varepsilon \cdot \omega} \varphi(\frac{x-q}{\varepsilon}) \qquad \sim \varepsilon^{1/2},$$

$$F_\varepsilon(x) = -\varepsilon^{-1/2} \sum_{q \in \varepsilon \cdot \omega} \nabla\varphi(\frac{x-q}{\varepsilon}) \sim \varepsilon^{-1/2},$$

$$\dot{V}_\varepsilon(t) = F_\varepsilon(X_\varepsilon(t)), \qquad \dot{X}_\varepsilon(t) = V(\varepsilon t), \qquad + \text{i.c.}$$

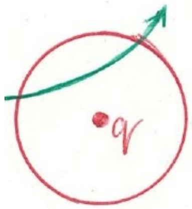
Let's guess the limit together.

- Conservation of energy:

$$\underbrace{|V_\varepsilon(t)|^2}_{E_{\mathrm{kin}}} + \underbrace{\Phi_\varepsilon(X_\varepsilon(t))}_{E_{\mathrm{pot}} \sim \varepsilon^{1/2}} = 1$$

  The particle travels with speed $|V_\varepsilon(t)| = 1 - \mathcal{O}(\varepsilon^{1/2})$.

- In (infinitesimal) time dt it encounters $\sim \varepsilon^{-1} dt$ scatterers.
- Each scatterer has impact $\sim \varepsilon^{1/2}$ on $V_\varepsilon(t)$:



$$\int_0^\varepsilon \varepsilon^{-1/2} \nabla\varphi \, ds$$

The expected limit: *Spherical Langevin Process*:

$t \mapsto U(t)$: Wiener ("BM") on $\mathbb{S}^{d-1}$, $\qquad Y(t) = \int_0^t U(s) ds$.

Not so easy to guess. Even harder to prove.

[H Kesten, G Papanicolaou (1980)]

Two steps limits.

Rnd-BG: [G70],[S78] : $(V_\varepsilon(t), X_\varepsilon(t)) \Rightarrow \underbrace{(U(t), Y(t))}_{\text{Markovian flight proc.}}$

Donsker : $T^{-1/2}Y(Tt) \Rightarrow W(t).$

Rnd-WC: [KP80] : $(V_\varepsilon(t), X_\varepsilon(t)) \Rightarrow \underbrace{(U(t), Y(t))}_{\text{spherical Langevin proc.}}$

Doeblin : $T^{-1/2}Y(Tt) \Rightarrow W(t).$

Per-BG: [MS11] : $(V_\varepsilon(t), X_\varepsilon(t)) \Rightarrow \underbrace{(U(t), Y(t))}_{\text{"hidden Markov" flight proc.}}$

[MT16] : $(T \log T)^{-1/2}Y(Tt) \Rightarrow W(t).$

Can one do better?

Interpolate between the Two Steps Limits and the Holy Grail!

$$? \quad T(\varepsilon)^{-1/2} X_\varepsilon(T(\varepsilon)t) \Rightarrow W(t) \quad ? \qquad (\star)$$

with $T(\varepsilon) \to \infty$ – the faster the better.

Some more recent results

Boltzmann-Grad/Low Density setting.

Theorem. [C Lutsko, BT (2020)] *Let* $d = 3$.
In the Boltzmann-Grad setting, $(\star)$ *holds with* $T(\varepsilon) = \varepsilon^{-3}|\log \varepsilon|^{-2}$

Weak Coupling setting.
Antecedents:
[T Komorowski, L Ryzhyk (2006)]:
In the Weak Coupling setting, $(\star)$ holds in $d \geq 3$ and $T(\varepsilon) = \varepsilon^{-\kappa}$ with some $\kappa > 0$ (but $\kappa \ll 1$).
[L Erdős, M Salmhofer, H-T Yau (2007)]:
Same in quantum setting with $\kappa \approx 1/370$.

Theorem. [BT (2025+)] *Let* $d \geq 3$.
In the Weak Coupling setting, $(\star)$ *holds with* $T(\varepsilon) = \varepsilon^{-(d-2)}$

Ideas for the low density setting:

$t \mapsto Y(t)$ the Markovian flight process. $U(t) := \dot{Y}(t)$

$t \mapsto X(t)$ the Lorentz *exploration* process, constructed from $Y(\cdot)$, adapted to the filtration of $Y(\cdot)$. $V(t) := \dot{X}(t)$.

The construction is such that w.h.p.

- mismatches between $U(t)$ & $V(t)$ occur w' frequency $\sim r$
- after mismatches $U(t)$ & $V(t)$ are recoupled (to $U = V$) within an $\mathtt{EXP}(1)$ time

Up to $t < T(r) = o(r^{-1})$**:** no mismatch of $U(t)$ & $V(t)$ w.h.p.

$$\lim \mathbf{P}\left(\inf\{t : X(t) \neq Y(t)\} < T\right) = 0$$

Up to $t < T(r) = o((r|\log r|)^{-2})$**:** (hand waving argument)

$$\max_{0\leq t\leq 1} \left| \frac{X(Tt)}{\sqrt{t}} - \frac{Y(Tt)}{\sqrt{t}} \right| \leq \frac{1}{\sqrt{T}} \int_0^T |V(s) - U(s)| ds \approx \frac{1}{\sqrt{T}} Tr \to 0$$

The coupling - in plain words:

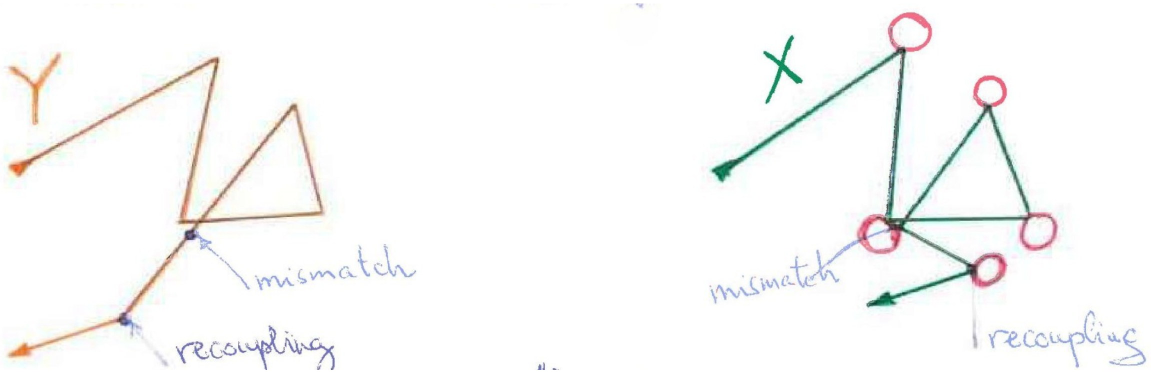
- $X(t)$ explores the environment on its way, trying to fly parallel with $Y(t)$ [trying to keep $V(t) = U(t)$] whenever possible.
- Explored areas are recorded and kept unchanged for ever.
- When in not-yet-explored "virgin" area, $X(t)$ behaves like $Y(t)$.
- When in already-explored-in-the-past area, $X(t)$ observes Newton's Laws.

What can go wrong? ... and the remedy ...

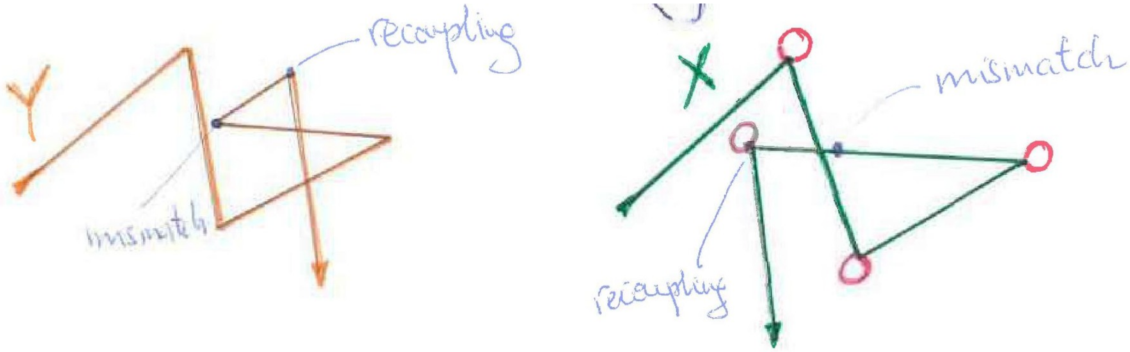
See next slide.

Mismatches and recouplings

- Recollisions with past scatterers



- Shadowed scatterings



- Note: {recollision} ↔ {shadowed scattering}, by time-reversal.

Theorem. [C Lutsko - BT (2020)]
Setting: $d = 3$, *this coupling, and BG-limit.*
(i) $T(r) = o(r^{-1})$*:*

$$\lim \mathbf{P}\left(\inf\{t : X(t) \neq Y(t)\} < T\right) = 0.$$

(ii) $T(r) = o((r|\log r|)^{-2})$*:* $\forall \delta > 0$

$$\lim \mathbf{P}\left(\max_{0 \leq t \leq T} |X(t) - Y(t)| > \delta\sqrt{T}\right) = 0.$$

Proof of (i): purely probabilistic, Green Function estimates for $Y(\cdot)$.

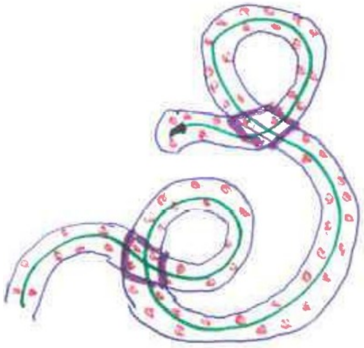
Proof of (ii): way more tricky. Geometric aspects of recollisions and "higher level" Green Function estimates matter.

Ideas for the weak coupling setting:

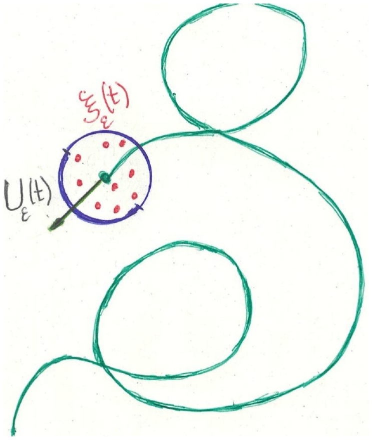
Explore!

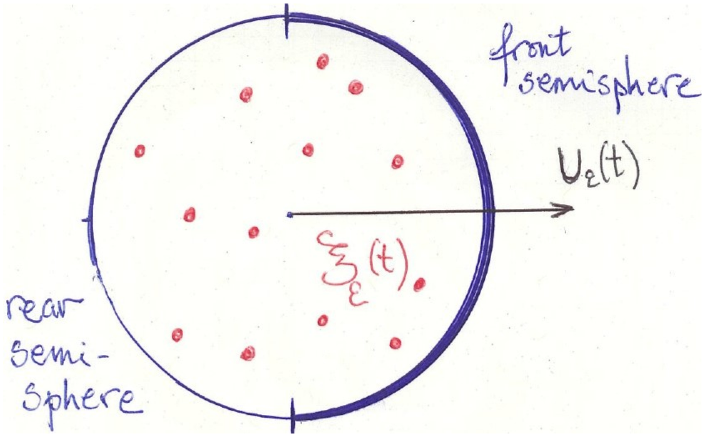
Rather than sample . . .

. . . explore the environment!

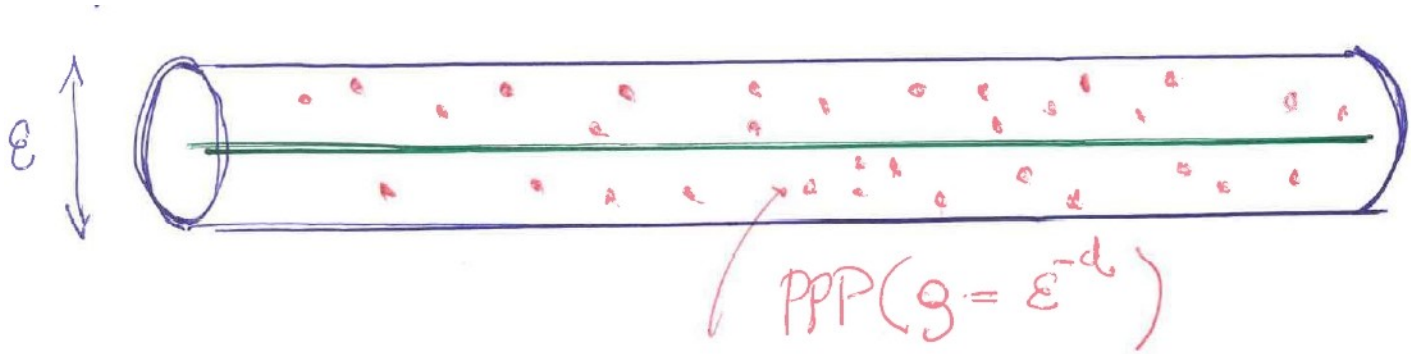


Markovize! $t \mapsto (U_\varepsilon(t), \xi_\varepsilon(t))$





Probabilistic ingredient for the construction of the Markovized process:



- explicit construction
- the MP $t \mapsto (U_\varepsilon(t), \xi_\varepsilon(t))$ is well-behaved due to
- $\theta_{\varepsilon,n} =$ successive times when $\xi_\varepsilon(t) = \emptyset$.

  $|\theta_{\varepsilon,n+1} - \theta_{\varepsilon,n}| \sim \varepsilon$, $n \mapsto U_\varepsilon(\theta_{\varepsilon,n})$ is a $O(d)$-invar. RW on $\mathbb{S}^{d-1}$

Limit theorems for the Markovized process.

(i) *Fix* $0 < T < \infty$. *Then, as* $\varepsilon \to 0$,

$$(U_\varepsilon(t), Y_\varepsilon(t)) \Rightarrow \underbrace{(U(t), Y(t))}_{\textit{spherical Langevin proc.}}$$

[Key: CLT for RW on $O(d)$.]

(ii) *Let* $T(\varepsilon) \to \infty$ (no matter how fast or slow). *Then, as* $\varepsilon \to 0$,

$$T(\varepsilon)^{-1/2} Y_\varepsilon(T(\varepsilon)t) \Rightarrow W(t)$$

[Key: Martingale approximation + martingale CLT.]

No surprises here.

Couple! (the physical and the Markovized processes)

To be proven: Up to $t < T(\varepsilon) = o(\varepsilon^{-d+2})$, with high probability, no ε-neighbourhood of a point left behind is revisited by the Markovized process $t \mapsto Y_\varepsilon(t)$:

$$\Sigma_\varepsilon := \inf\{t : 0 < \exists\, r < \exists\, s < t, \text{such that} \quad B_\varepsilon(Y_\varepsilon(r)) \cap B_\varepsilon(Y_\varepsilon(s))^{\mathsf{c}} \cap B_\varepsilon(Y_\varepsilon(t)) \neq \emptyset\}$$

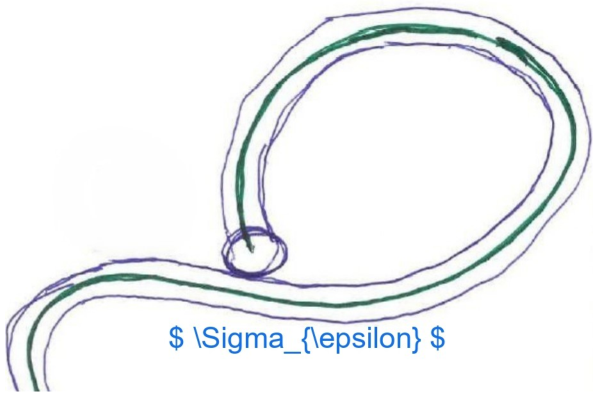
$=$ the first time (t) when a point which was within range ε some time (r) in the past, and left behind (at time $s > r$), is revisited within range ε (at time $t > s$).

By construction (coupling): $\inf\{t : V_\varepsilon(t) \neq U_\varepsilon(t)\} \geq \Sigma_\varepsilon$

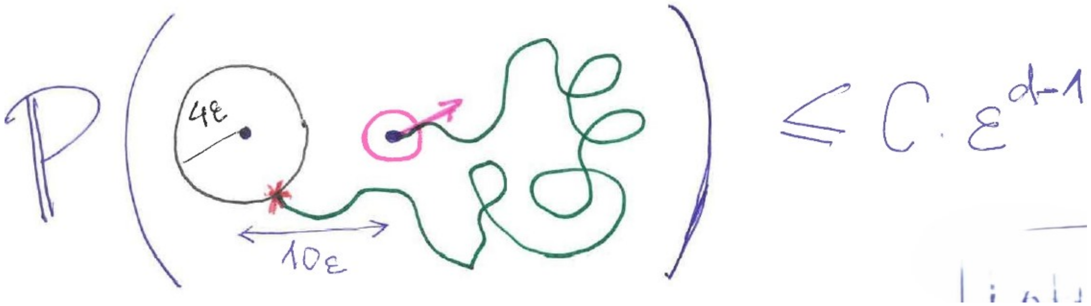
Lower bound on Σ_ε is needed. However, Σ_ε can in principle be very small, if the trajectory $t \mapsto Y_\varepsilon(t)$ is too rough.

Geometry helps:

$$|\ddot{Y}_\varepsilon| = |\dot{U}_\varepsilon| \sim \varepsilon^{-1/2} \ll \varepsilon^{-1}$$



The main probabilistic input



(note the difference from BM)

relies on Green-function (for $t \mapsto Y_{\varepsilon(t)}$) and geometric estimates

Hence (by union bounds and some massaging) the key estimate

$$\mathbf{P}\left(\Sigma_\varepsilon < T\right) < CT\varepsilon^{d-2}. \qquad ☺$$

Back to BG-lim - Other interactions, and/or $d \neq 3$:

Spherical scatterers in $d = 3$ are special (Archimedes ☺) since

$$\sigma(v, v')dv' = |v - v'|^{3-d} dv'$$

If Döblin's condition $\sigma(v, v')dv' > c dv'$ **holds**, apply
Döblin's trick: *Break up* Y *into independent legs*.
Essentially the same probabilistic estimates work.

Applications:

(1) Ehrenfest's Wind-Tree model:

$d = 2$ $\diamondsuit$-scatterers $v \in \{\rightarrow, \uparrow, \leftarrow, \downarrow\}$

[Lutsko - T (2021)]: IP up to $T = o(r^{-1})$.
Compare with the "mirror model" on $\mathbb{Z}^d$.
[D Elboim, A Gloria, P Hernandez (2025)]: IP for the mirror model under BG-lim: $d \geq 5$, up to $T = \mathcal{O}(r^{-N})$, $N < \infty$!

(2) Spherical scatterers, $d \geq 4$. [Not written up]
Note however, that $T = o(r^{1-d}|\log r|^{-\alpha})$ is a strict borderline for this method.

(3) Lorentz gas in $d = 2$, *in transversal magnetic field*.
Kinetic time scale, $T = \mathcal{O}(1)$: [Bobylev et al. (1995)] . . .
[A Nota, C Saffirio, S Simonella (2021)]
alt. proof & IP up to $T(r) = o((r|\log r|^2)^{-1})$ [L-T (2025)]

If Döblin's condition does not hold for σ but holds for $\sigma * \sigma$:
Break up Y into one-dependent legs. More tricky:
Green's fnc estimates for RWs with one-dependent steps needed.

Application:

(4) $d = 2$, spherical scatterers, up to $T(r) = o((r|\log r|^2)^{-1})$
[Not written up]

Back to BG-lim – Semi-quenched:

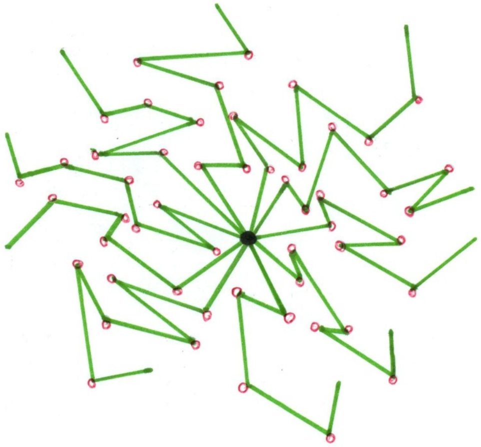
- ∘ $d = 3$; scatterers: $r = \varepsilon^{3/2}$ centred at $\{\varepsilon q : q \in \varpi \sim \mathtt{PPP(1)}\}$,
- ∘ $t \mapsto X(t)$: the Lorentz traj. with $\dot{X}(0) = \mathtt{UNI}(\{v : \angle(v, e) \leq \beta\})$.

Theorem 1. `[Semi-quenched IP]` [T (2025)]
If $\varepsilon_n \to 0$, $T_n \to \infty$, $\beta_n \in (0, \pi]$ *are such that*

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \left(r_n T_n \log n + (r_n \beta_n^{-1})^{2/3} (\log n)^2 \right) < \infty$$

then for almost all realizations of the PPP ϖ,

$$T^{-1/2} X(T\cdot) \overset{\text{BG-lim}}{\Rightarrow} W(\cdot)$$



Convert annealed to (semi)quenched IP by *joint exploration*.

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION.