Timing and coordination

Gregor Schöner

movement timing

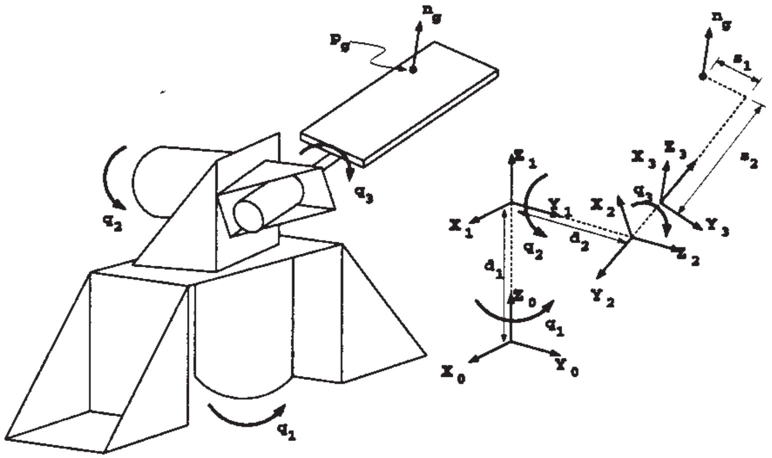
- generating actual time courses of movement
- organizing movements in time: coordination

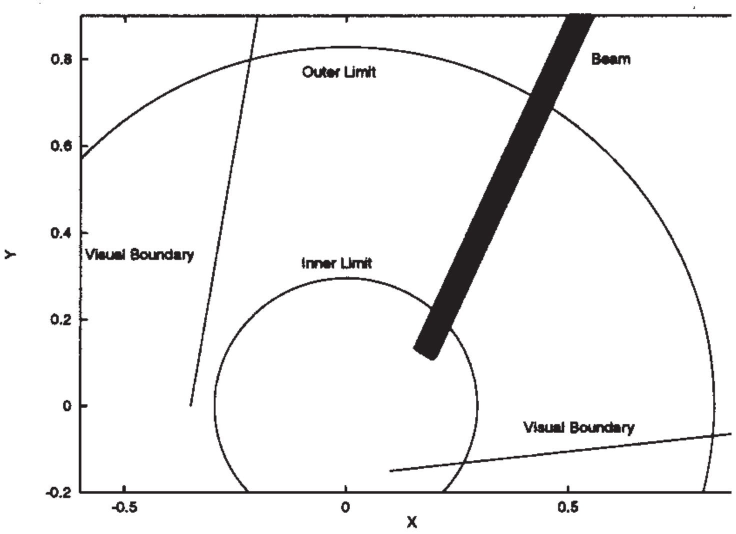
How is timing done in conventional robotics?

- fixed templates of timing encoded in digital computers… determined from trajectory planning algorithms that a purely kinematic
- advanced: taking the physical dynamics into account, time course of control signals determined to optimize some cost function… solved on a digital computer, normally ahead of time

How is timing done in conventional robotics?

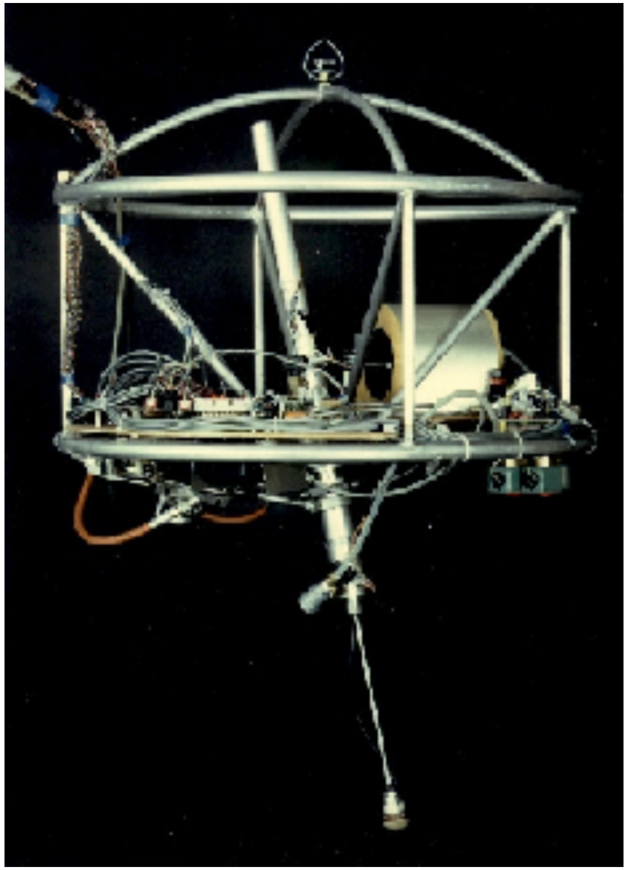
- Koditschek’s juggling robot:
  - physical dynamics of bouncing ball modeled… actuator inserts a term into that dynamics so that a periodic solution (limit cycle) results
  - ball is kept within reach by conventional P control from contact to contact





How is timing done in conventional robotics?

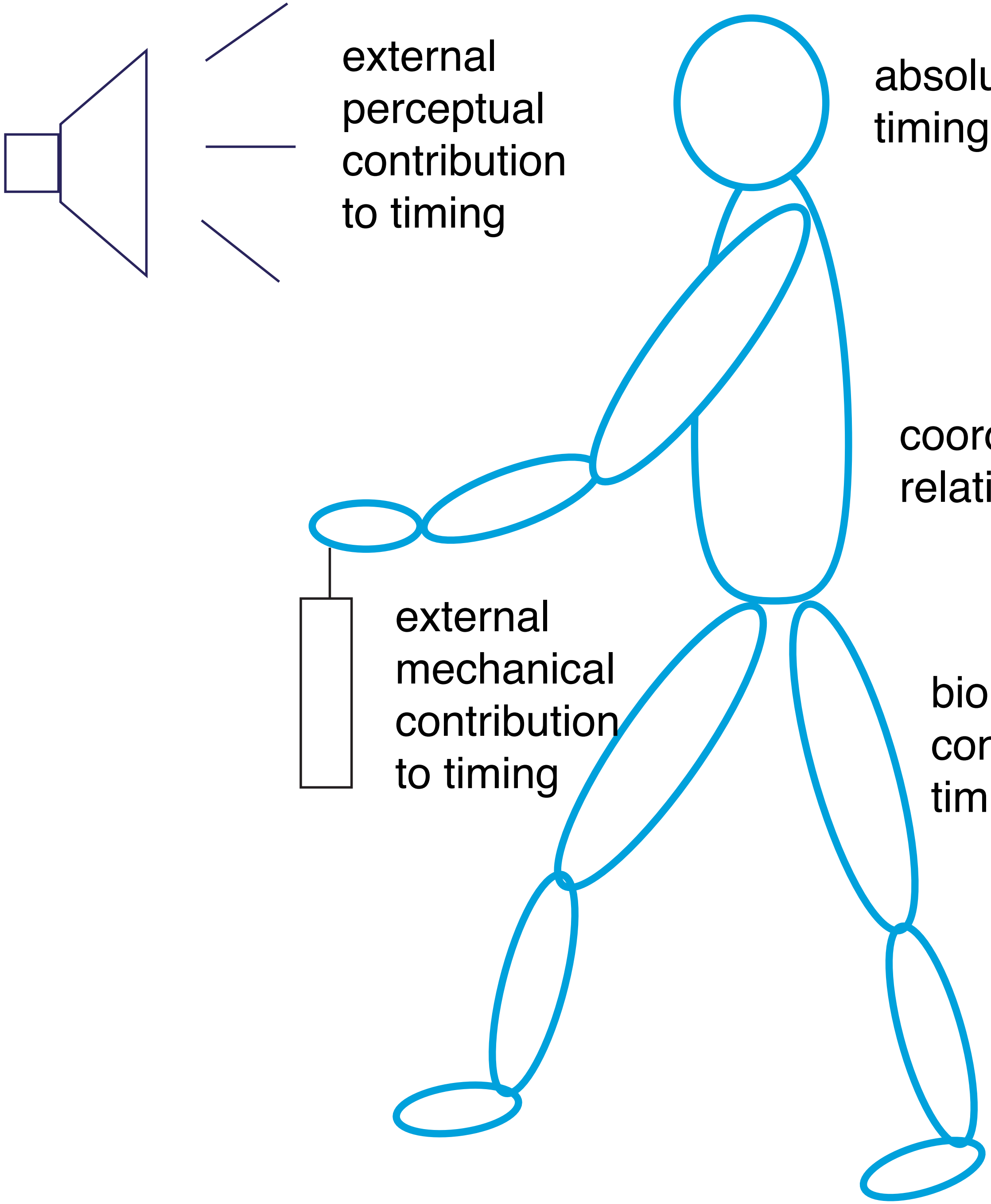
- Raibert’s hopping robots
  - dynamics bouncing robot modeled… actuator inserts a term into that dynamics so that a periodic solution (limit cycle) results
  - robot is kept upright by controlling leg angle to achieve particular horizontal position for Center of Mass



How is timing done in conventional robotics?

- Raibert's bio-dog
  - expand that idea by coordination among limbs
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8YjvHYbZ9w

Timing in nervous systems



external
perceptual
contribution
to timing

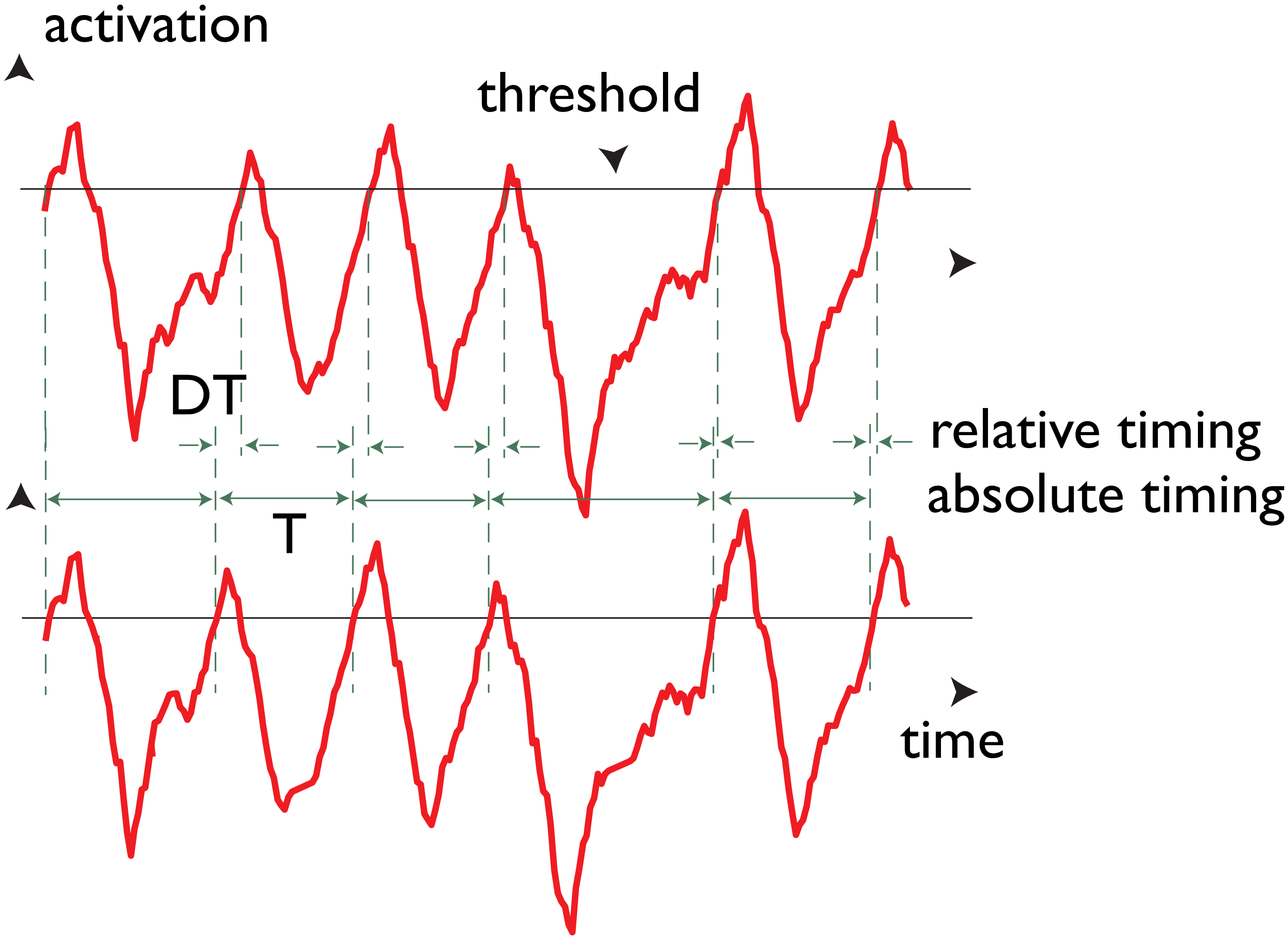
absolute
timing

coordination:
relative timing

external
mechanical
contribution
to timing

biomechanical
contribution to
timing

Relative vs. absolute timing



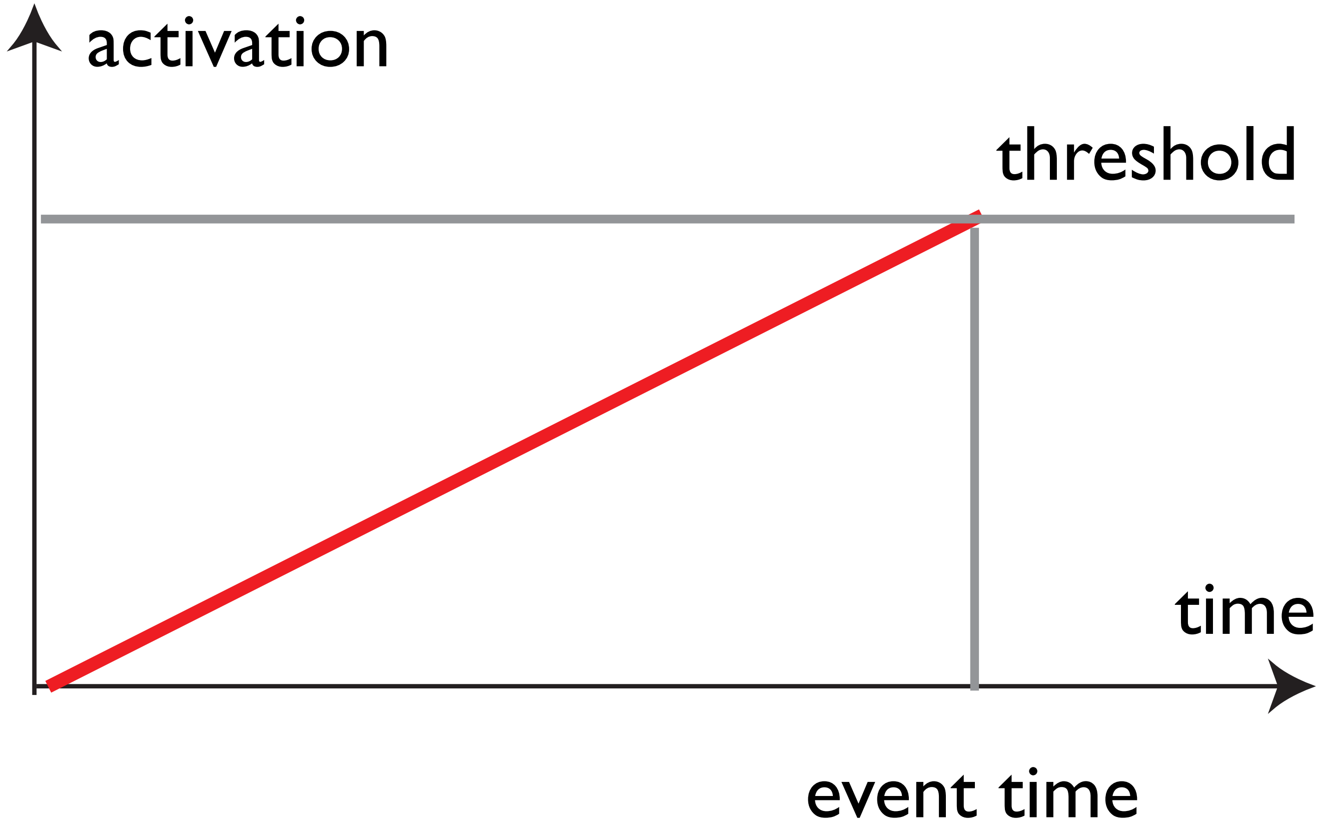
relative phase=DT/T

Absolute timing

- examples: music, prediction, estimating time
- typical task: tapping
- self-paced vs. externally paced

Clocks

- activation growth (hour glass)

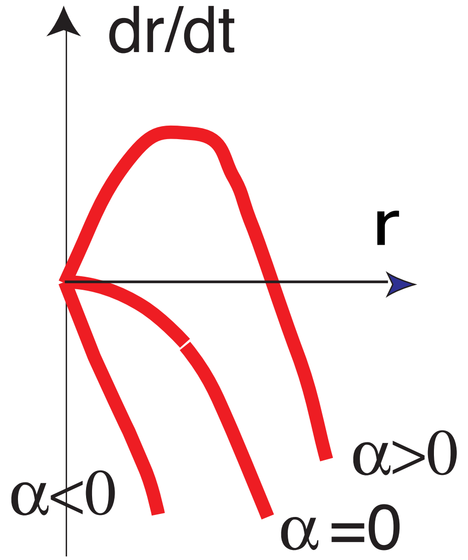


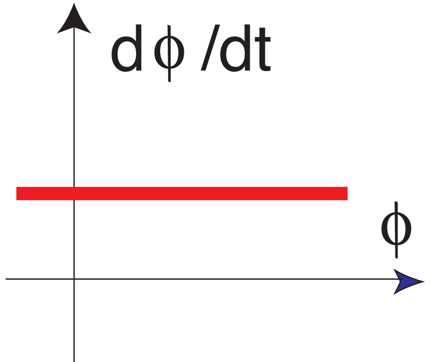
Hopf bifurcation/Hopf oscillator

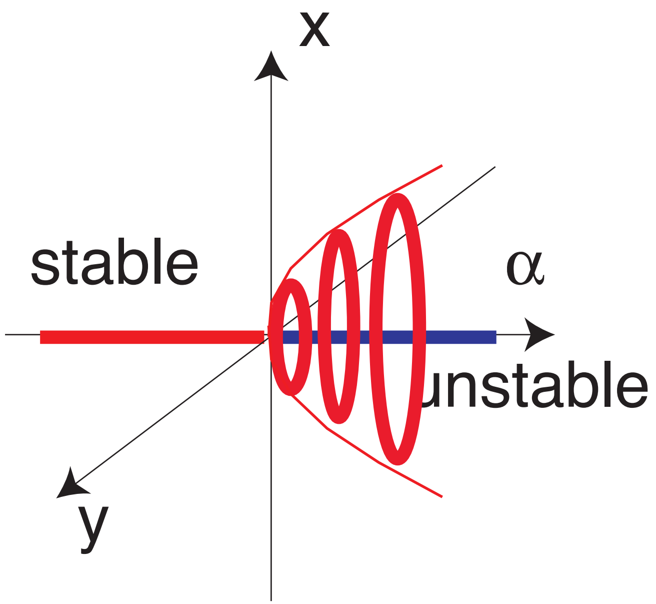
- normal form $$\begin{pmatrix} \dot{x} \\ \dot{y} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \alpha & -\omega \\ \omega & \alpha \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} x \\ y \end{pmatrix} - (x^2 + y^2) \begin{pmatrix} x \\ y \end{pmatrix}$$

$$x = r\cos(\phi) \qquad \dot{r} = \alpha r - r^3$$

$$y = r\sin(\phi) \qquad \dot{\phi} = \omega$$







$$x(t) = \sqrt{\alpha}\sin(\omega t)$$

amplitude $A = \sqrt{\alpha}$

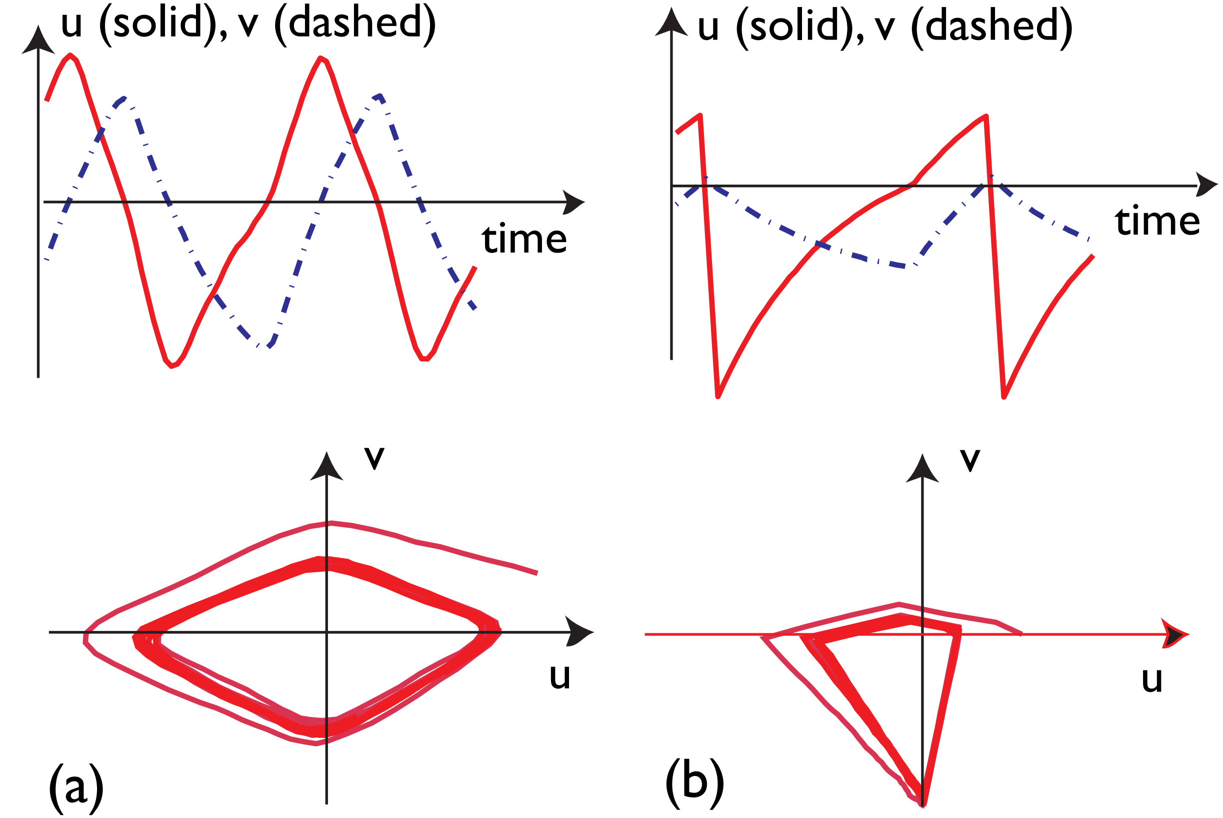
cycle time $T = 2\pi/\omega$,

Clocks=limit cycle attractors

- neural oscillator (Amari 77)

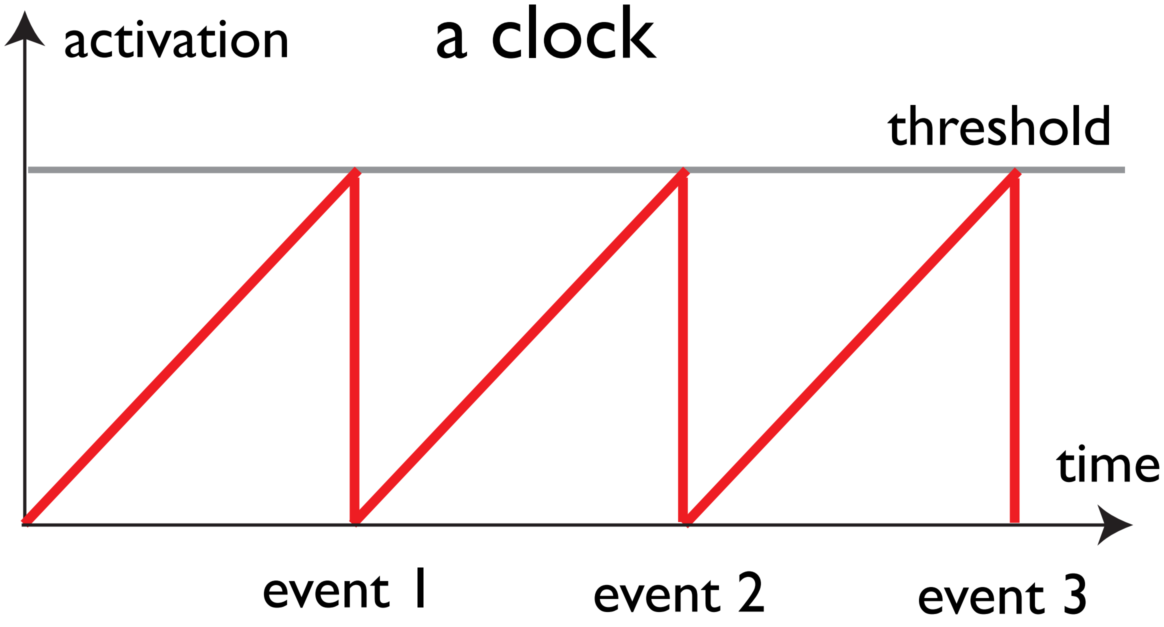
$$\tau\dot{u} = -u + h_u + w_{uu}f(u) - w_{uv}f(v)$$

$$\tau\dot{v} = -v + h_v + w_{vu}f(u),$$



Clocks

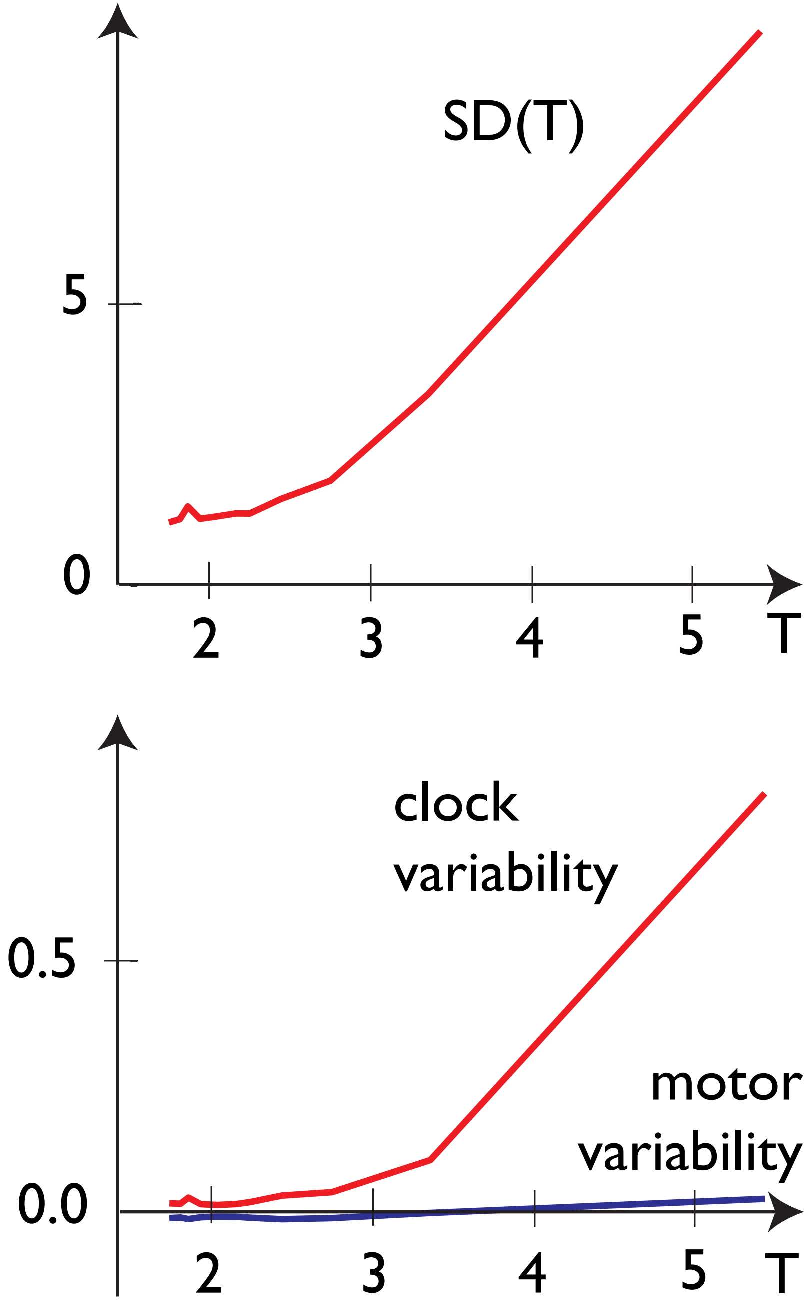
- hour glasses are oscillators as well



[from: Schöner, Brain & Cogn 48:31 (2002)]

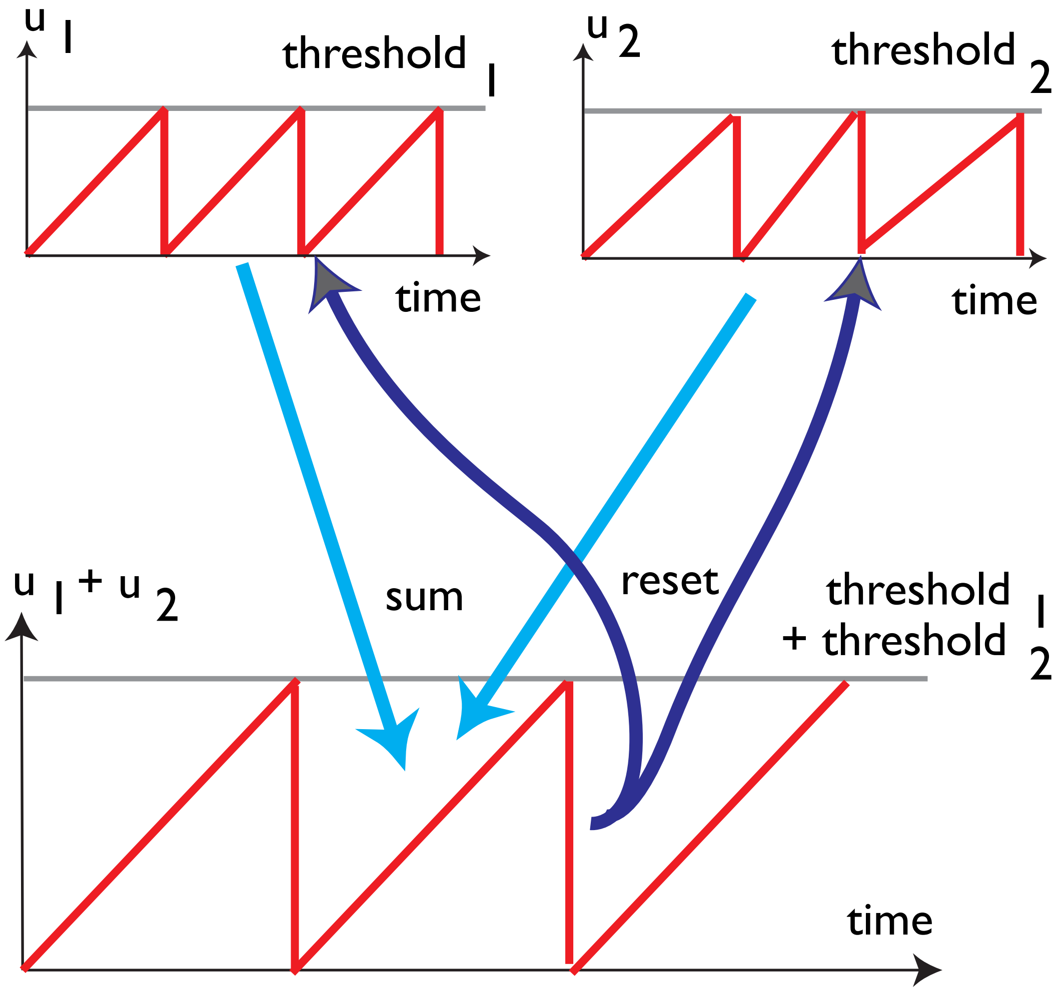
Absolute timing diffusion

- provides an account for increase of timing variance with duration



Reduced timing variance for bimanual movement

- observed by Ivry and colleagues
- accounted for by averaging of two times
- but: requires coupling



Relative timing: movement coordination

- locomotion, interlimb and intralimb
- speaking
- mastication
- music production
- … approximately rhythmic

Examples of coordination of temporally discrete acts:

- reaching and grasping
- bimanual manipulation
- coordination among fingers during grasp
- catching, intercepting

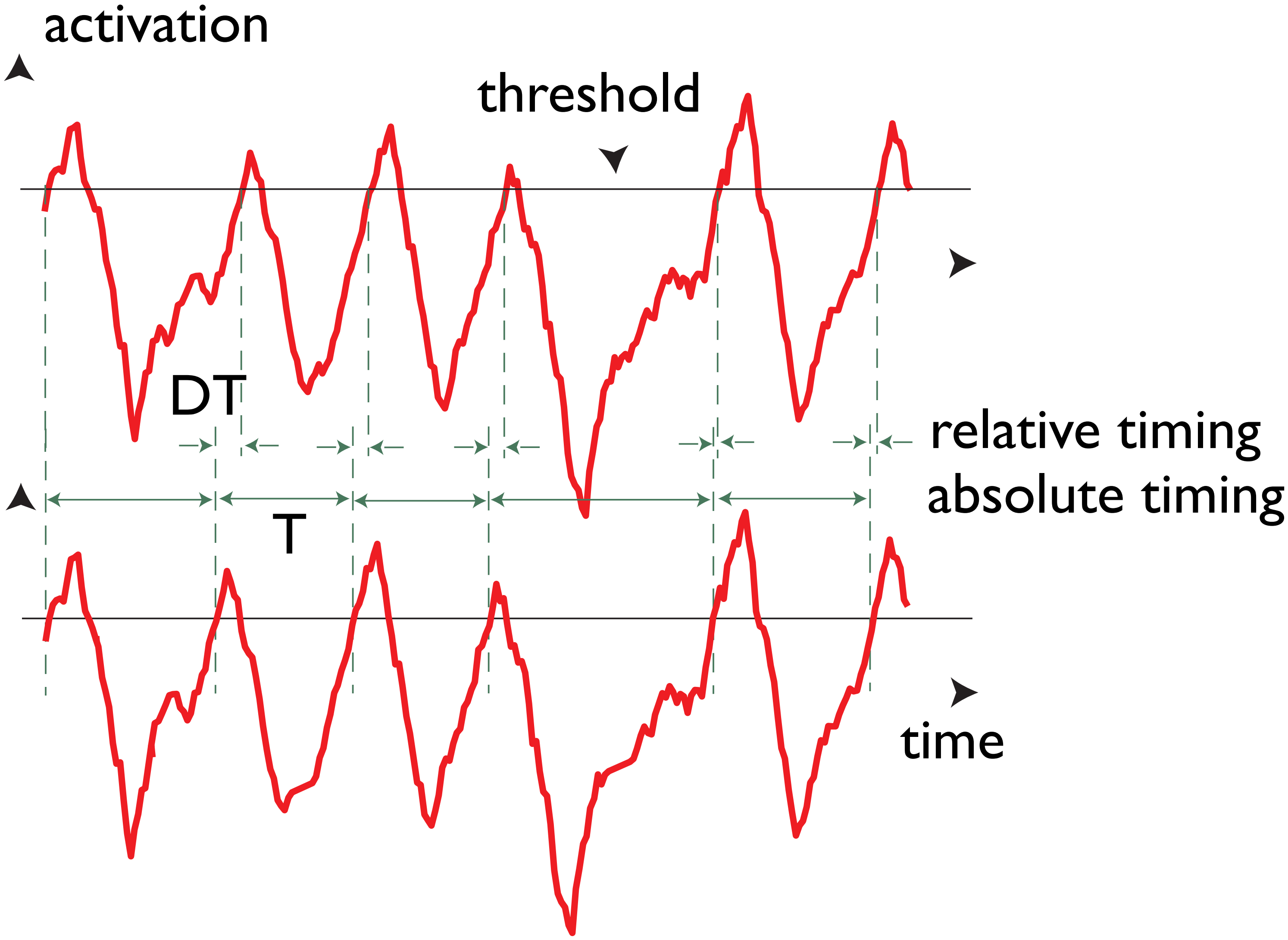
Definition of coordination

- Coordination is the maintenance of stable timing relationships between components of voluntary movement.
- Operationalization: recovery of coordination after perturbations
- Example: speech articulatory work (Gracco, Abbs, 84; Kelso et al, 84)
- Example: action-perception patterns

Is movement always timed/ coordinated?

- No, for example:
- locomotion: whole body displacement in the plane
  - in the presence of obstacles takes longer
  - delay does not lead to compensatory acceleration
- but coordination is pervasive...
  - e.g., coordinating grasp with reach

Relative vs. absolute timing

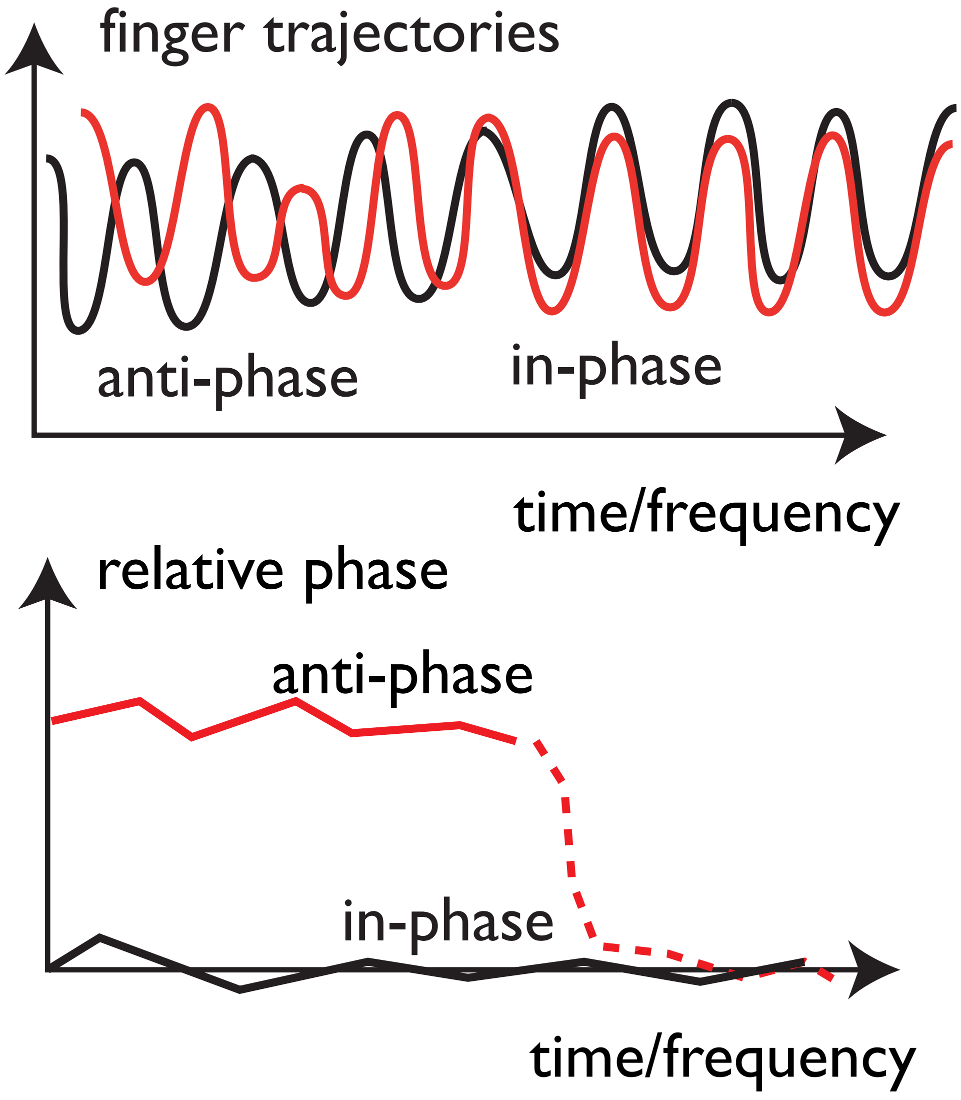


relative phase=DT/T

Two basic patterns of coordination

- in-phase
  - synchronization, moving through like phases simultaneously
  - e.g., gallop (approximately)
- anti-phase or phase alternation
  - syncopation
  - e.g., trott

An instability in rhythmic movement coordination

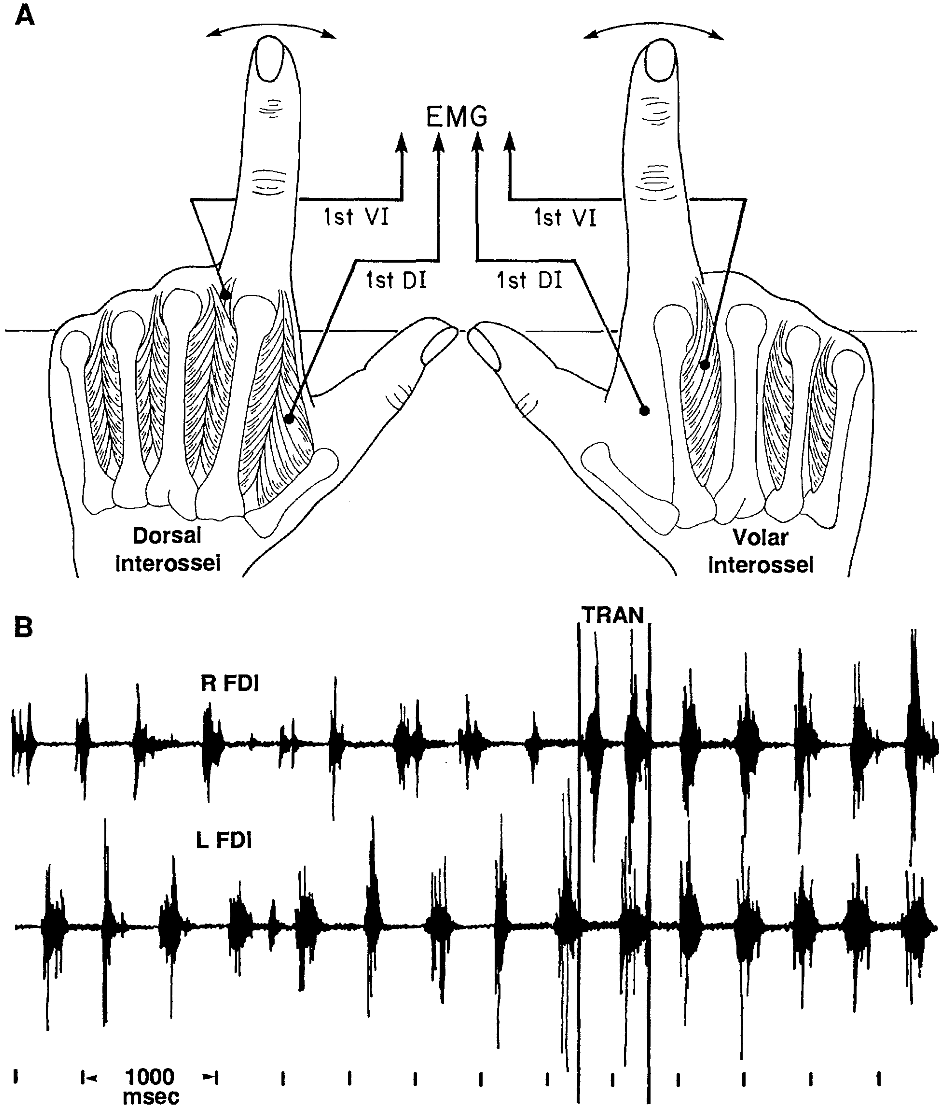


- switch from anti-phase to in-phase as rhythm gets faster

Kelso, 1984

Instability

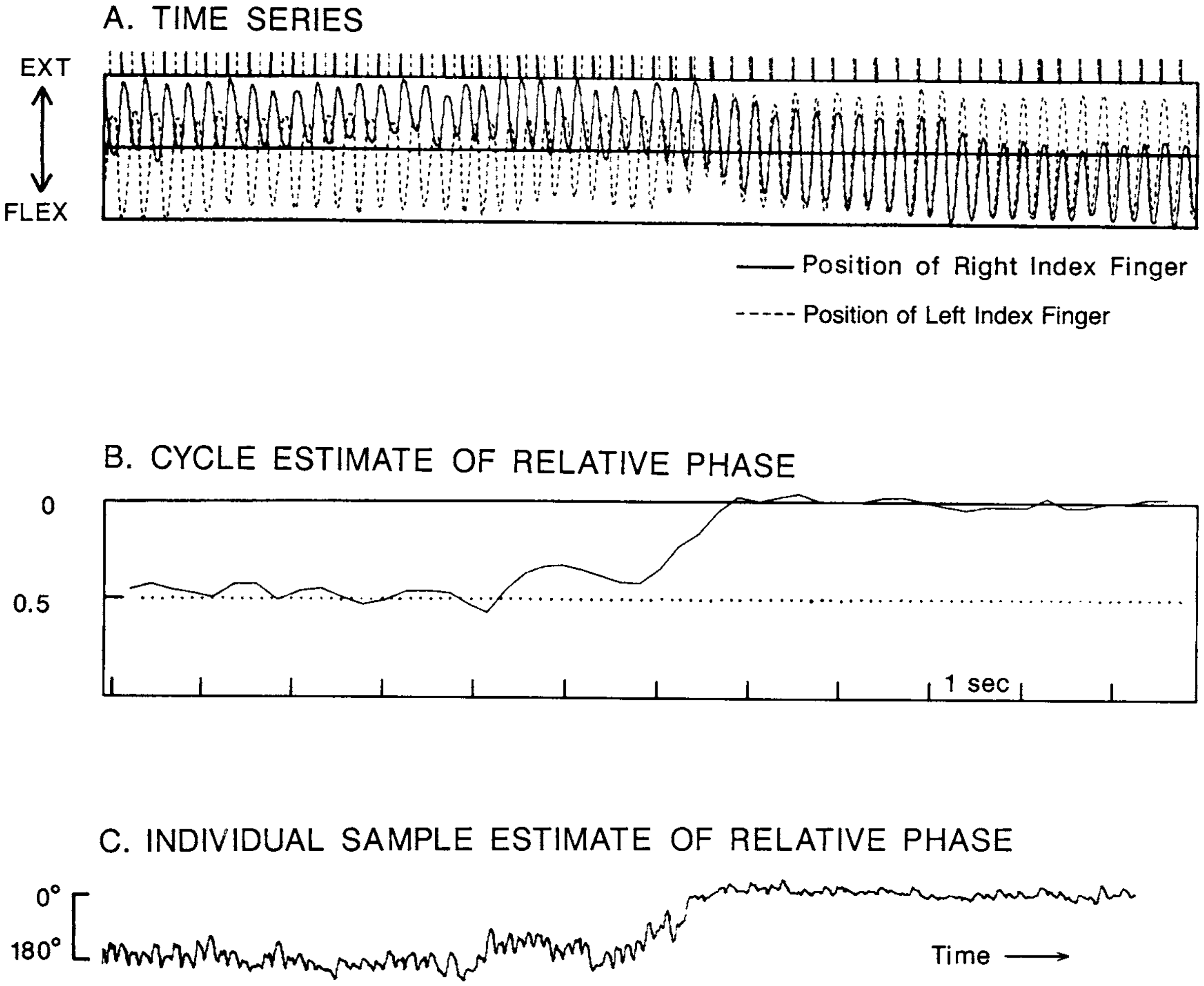
- experiment involves finger movement
- why fingers?
  - no mechanical coupling
  - constraint of maximal frequency irrelevant
  - => pure neurallly based coordination



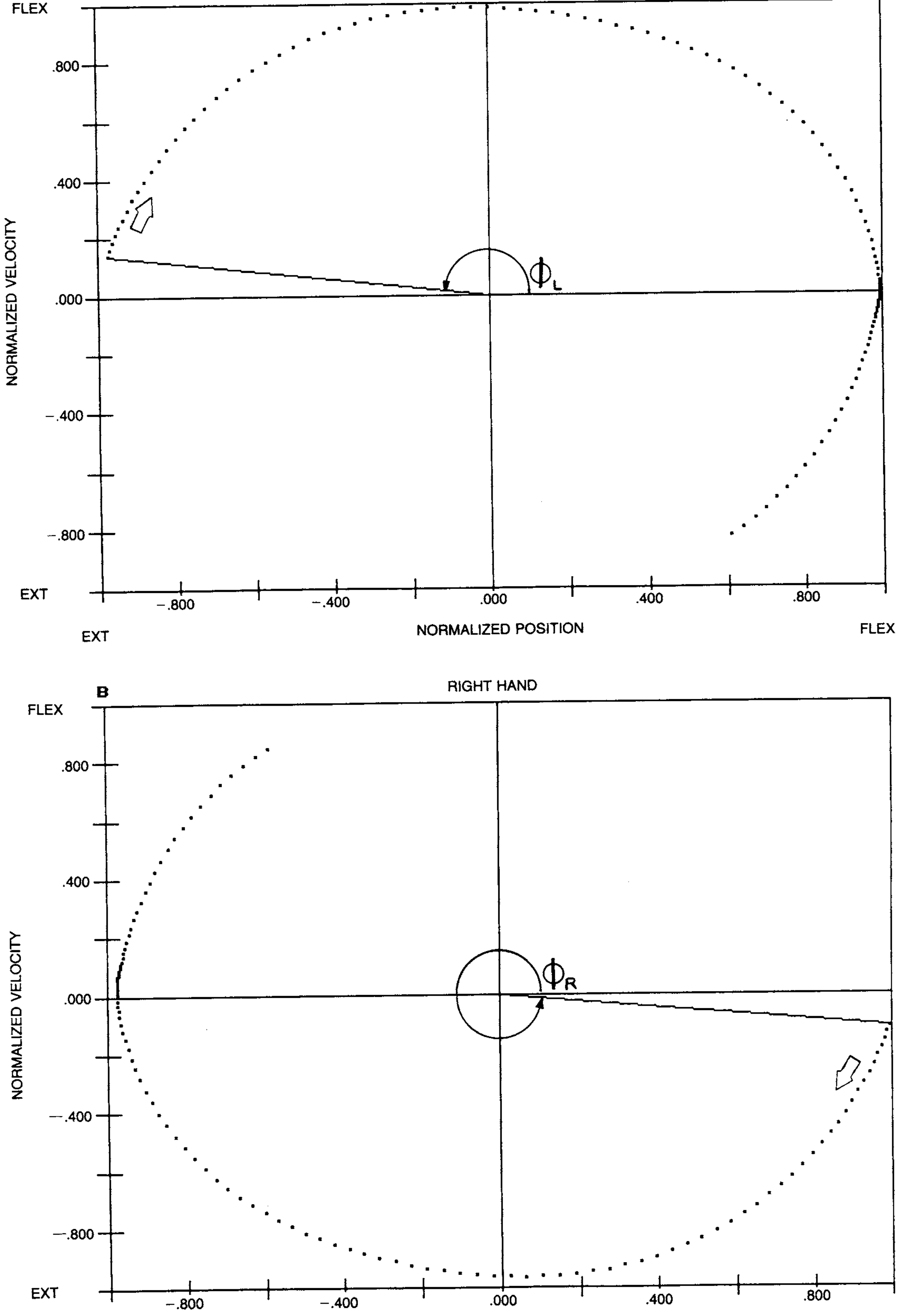
Schöner, Kelso (Science, 1988)

Instability

- frequency imposed by metronomes and varied in steps
- either start out in-phase or anti-phase



data example (Scholz, 1990)



computation of continuous relative phase (Scholz, 1990)

Pattern stability

- instability: anti-phase pattern no longer persists
- thus: even though mean pattern is unchanged up to transition, its stability is lost
- => stability is an important property of coordination patterns, that is not captured by the mean performance alone

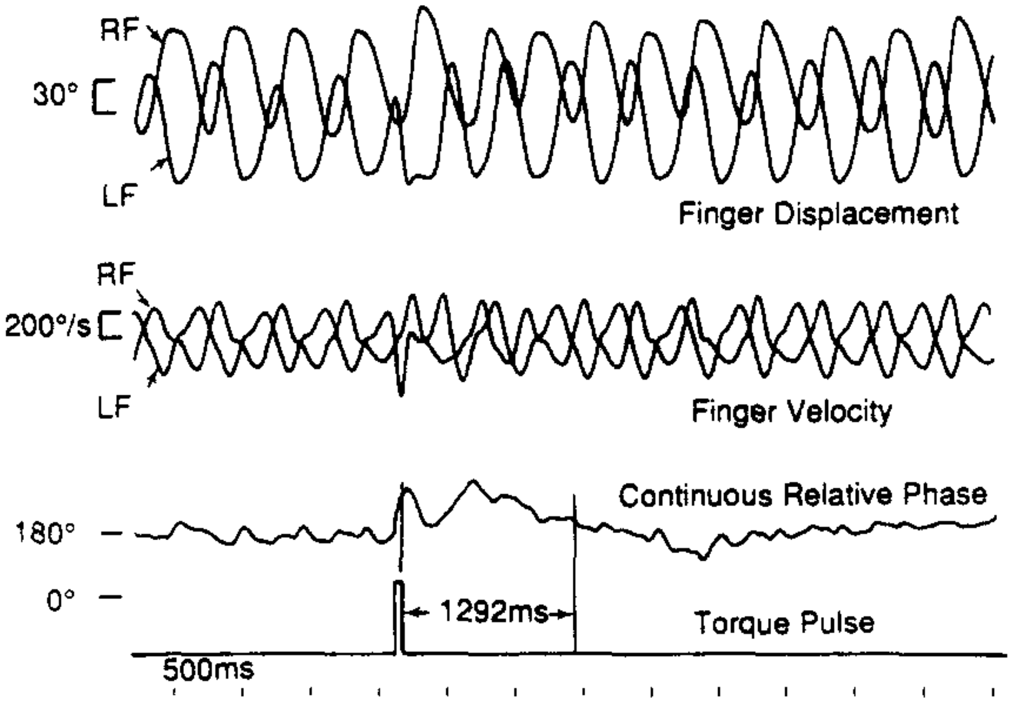
Measures of stability

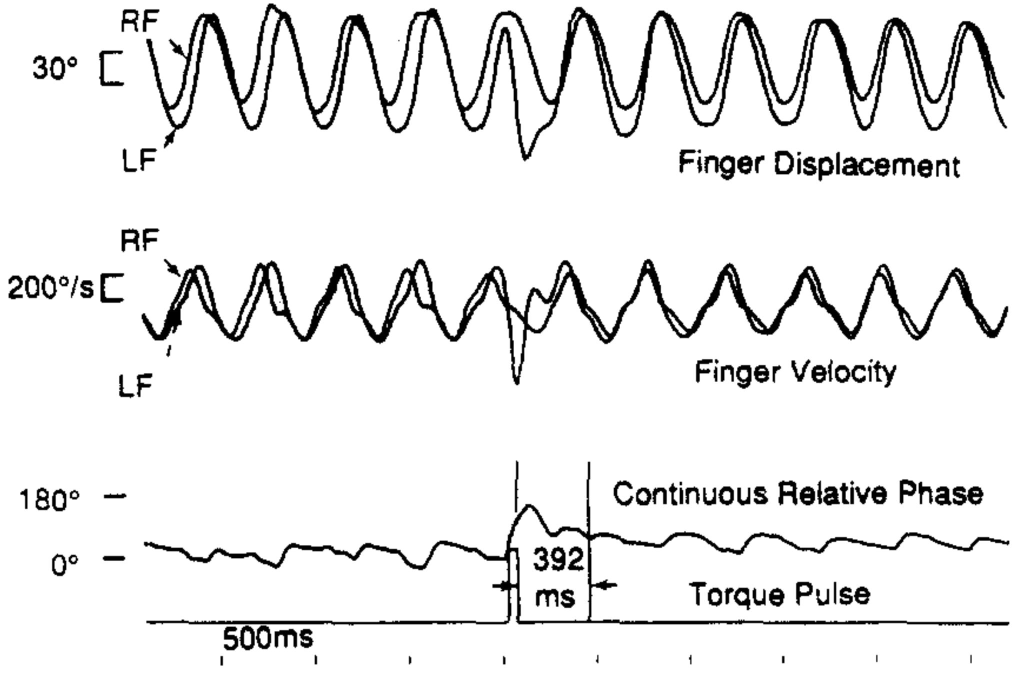
- variance: fluctuations in time are an index of degree of stability
  - stochastic perturbations drive system away from the coordinated movement
  - the less resistance to such perturbations, the larger the variance

Measures of stability

- relaxation time
  - time need to recover from an outside perturbation
  - e.g., mechanically perturb one of the limbs, so that relative phase moves away from the mean value, then look how long it takes to go back to the mean pattern
  - the less stable, the longer relaxation time

data example perturbation of fingers and relative phase

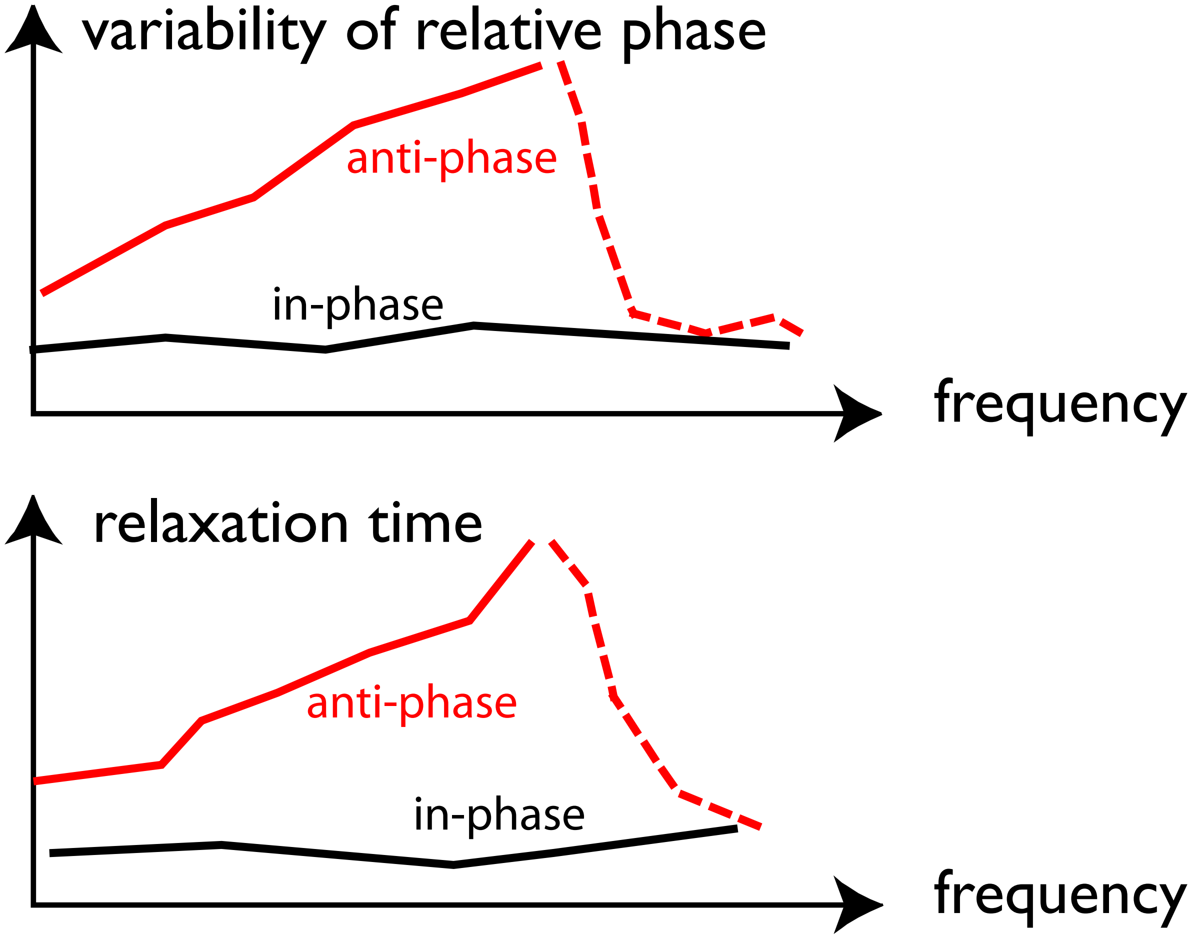


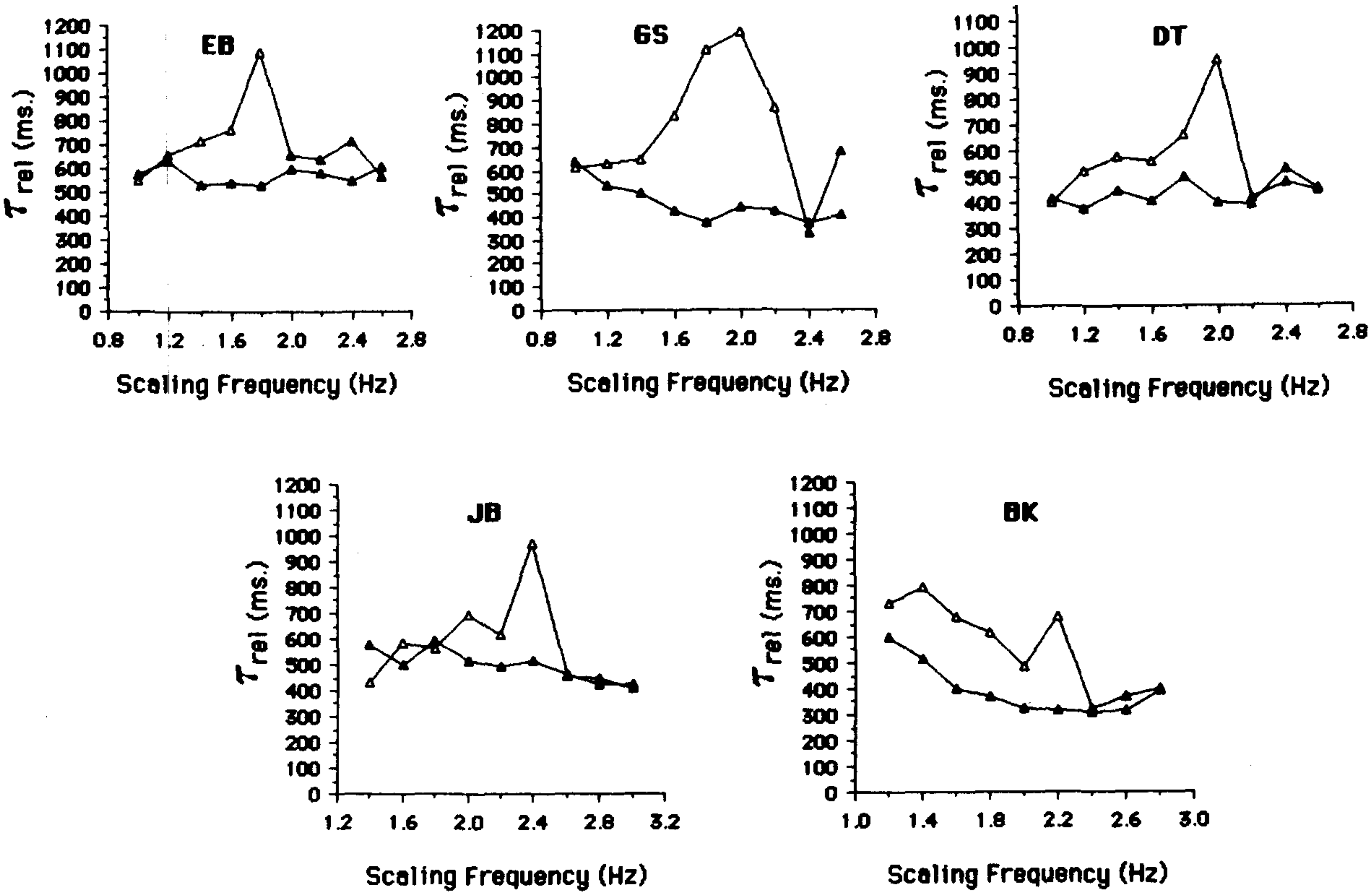


Scholz, Kelso, Schöner, 1987

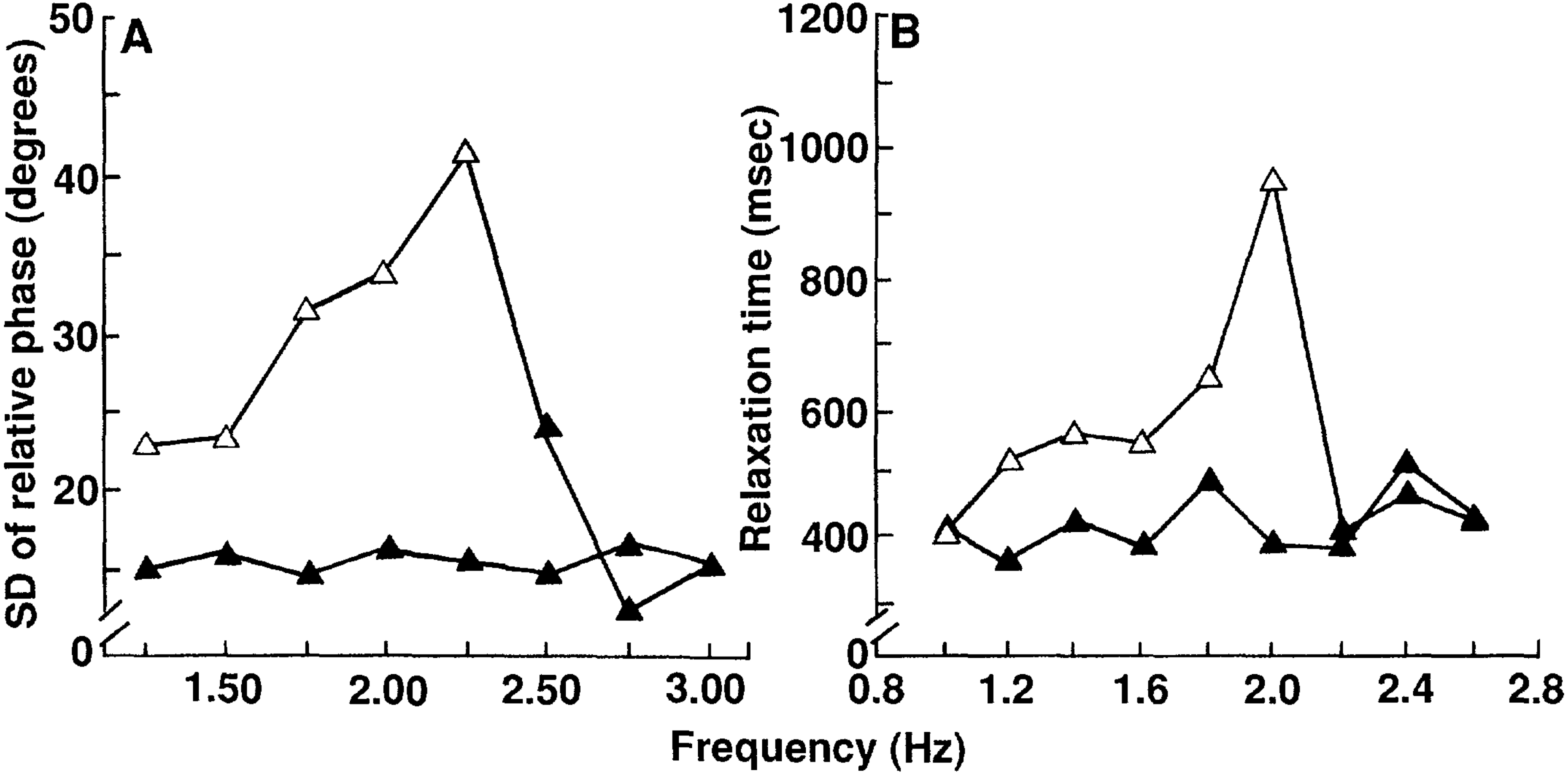
Signatures of instability

- loss of stability indexed by measures of stability





relaxation times, individual data



data (averaged across subjects)

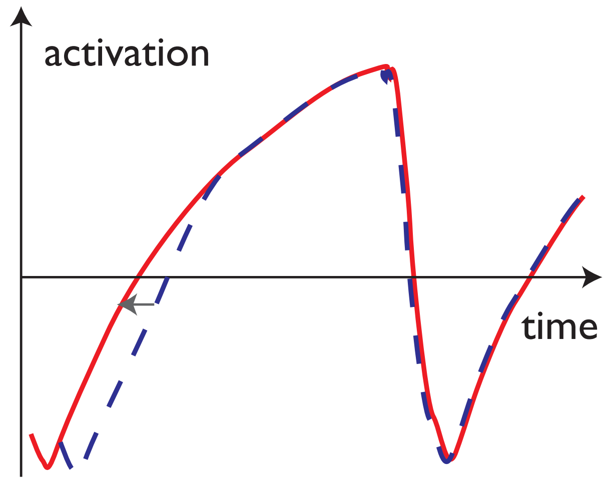
Schöner, Kelso (Science, 1988)

Neuronal basis of the two basic patterns

- rhythmic movement patterns are driven by neuronal oscillators
- their excitatory interaction leads to in-phase
- their inhibitory interaction leads to anti-phase

Coordination from coupling

- coordination=stable relative timing emerges from coupling of neural oscillators



$$\tau\dot{u}_1 = -u_1 + h_u + w_{uu}f(u_1) - w_{uv}f(v_1)$$

$$\tau\dot{v}_1 = -v_1 + h_v + w_{vu}f(u_1) \boxed{+ cf(u_2)}$$

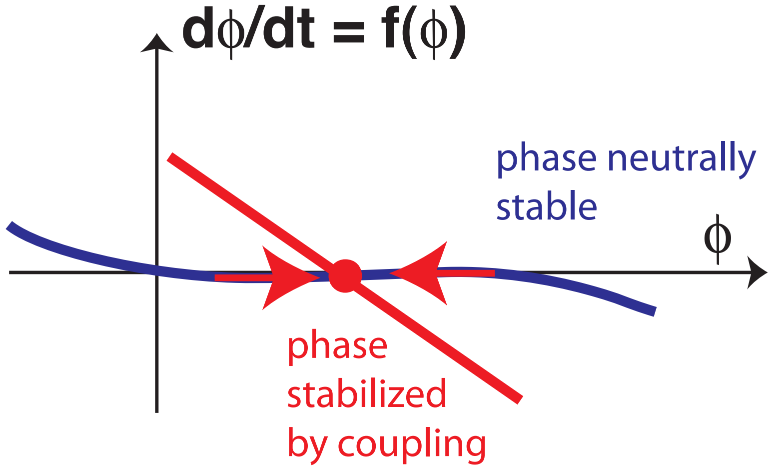
$$\tau\dot{u}_2 = -u_2 + h_u + w_{uu}f(u_2) - w_{uv}f(v_2)$$

$$\tau\dot{v}_2 = -v_2 + h_v + w_{vu}f(u_2) \boxed{+ cf(u_1)}$$

[Schöner: Timing, Clocks, and Dynamical Systems. *Brain and Cognition* 48:31-51 (2002)]

Movement timing

- marginal stability of phase enables stabilizing relative timing while keeping trajectory unaffected



[Schöner: Timing, Clocks, and Dynamical Systems. *Brain and Cognition* 48:31-51 (2002)]

Dynamical systems account of instability

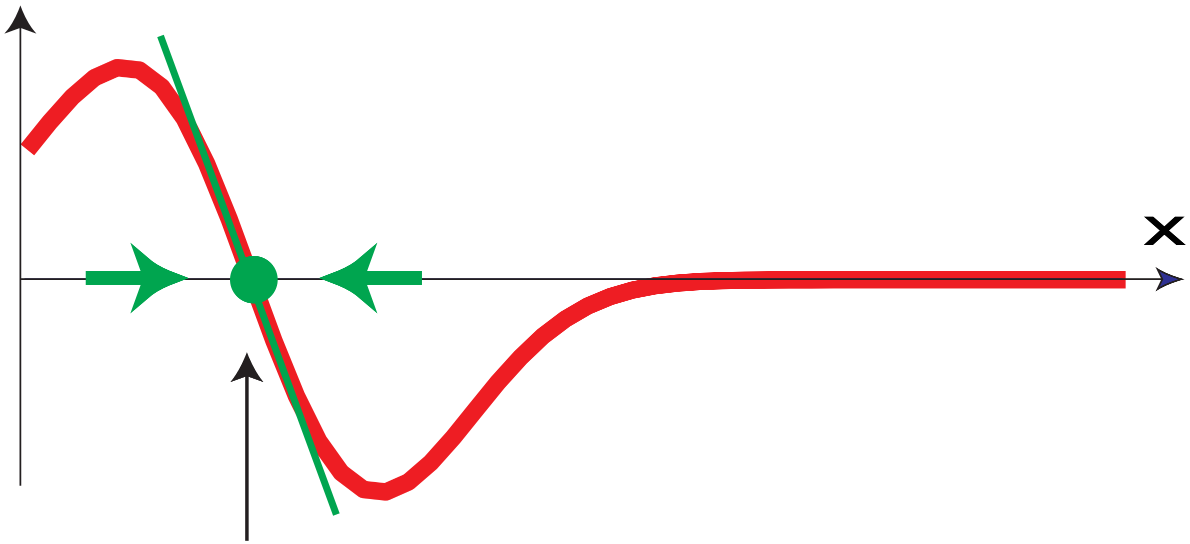
- coordination patterns are stable states
- stability may vary and may be lost
- instability leads to pattern change

Dynamical systems account of instability

- state of dynamical system x=relative phase

dynamical system

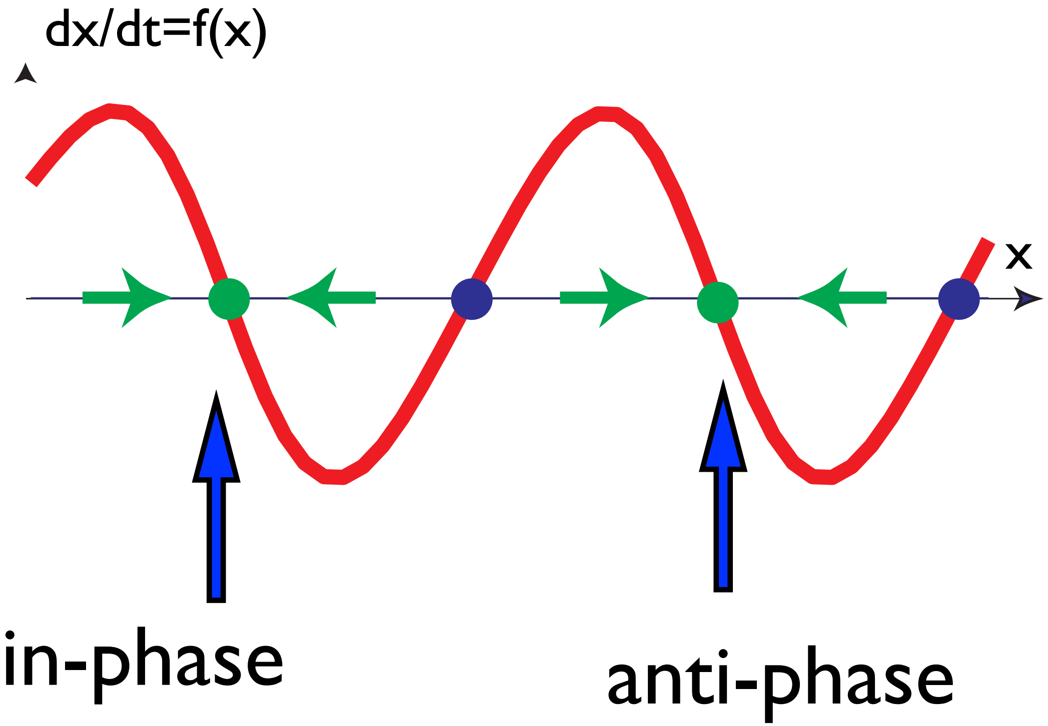
dx/dt=f(x)



fixed point, which is stable (attractor)

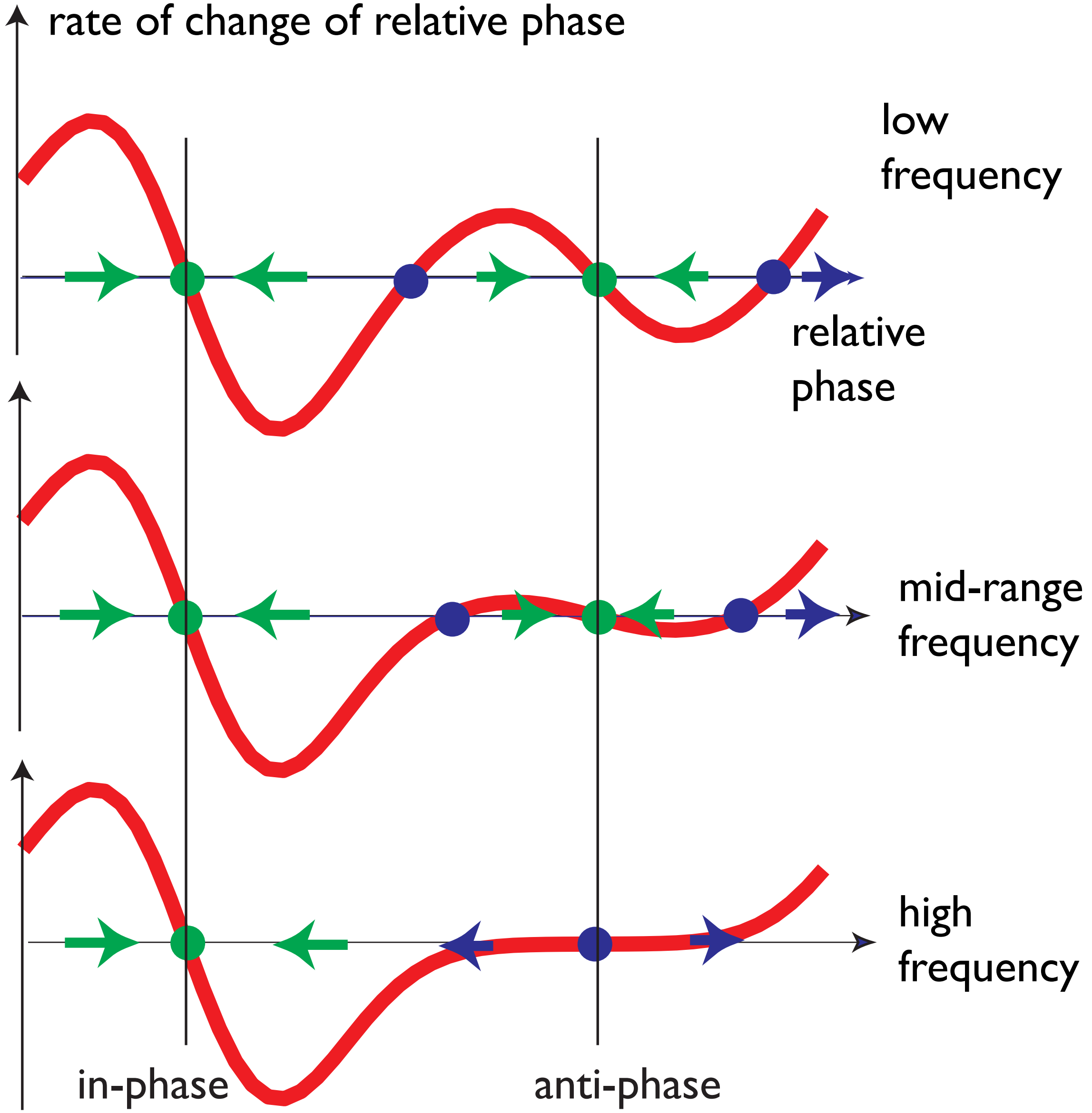
Dynamical systems account of instability

- at low frequencies this system is bistable



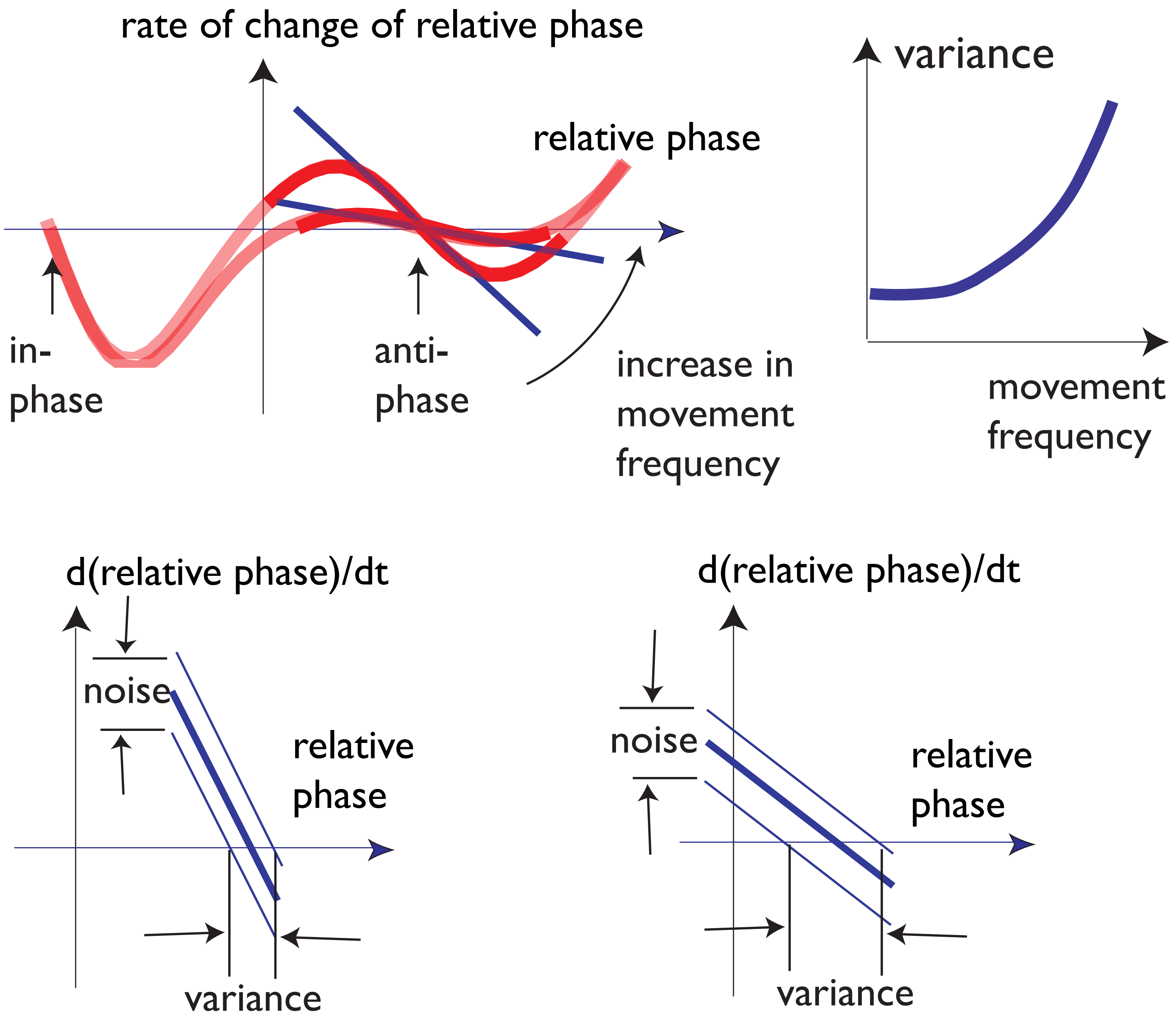
Dynamical systems account of instability

- at increasing frequency stability of anti-phase is lost



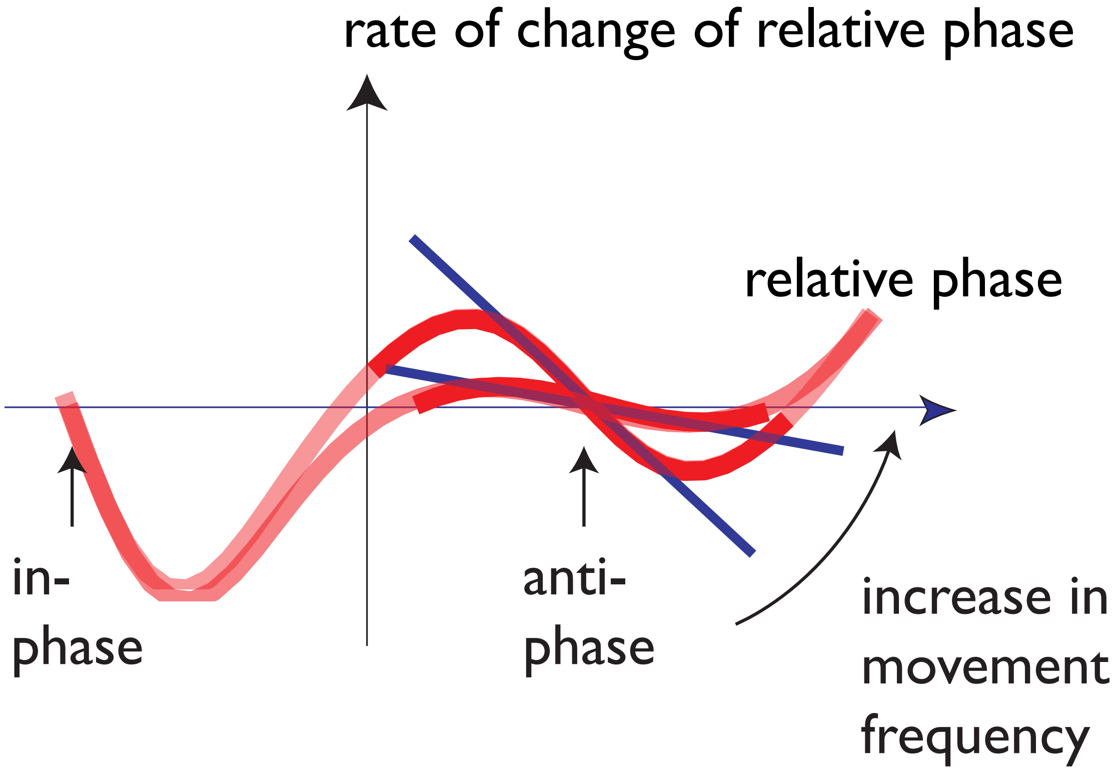
Predicts increase in variance

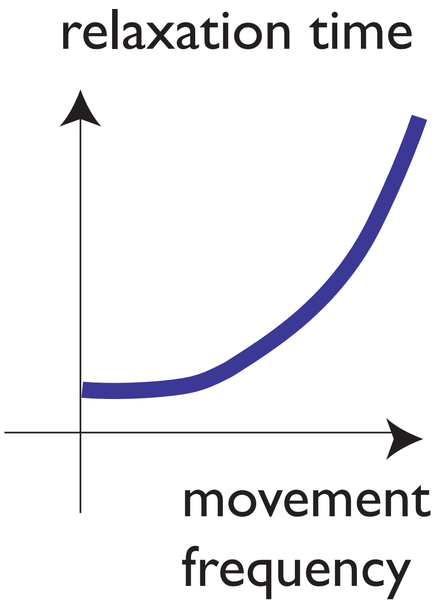
- “critical fluctuations”



Predicts increase in relaxation time

- "critical slowing down"





Conclusion

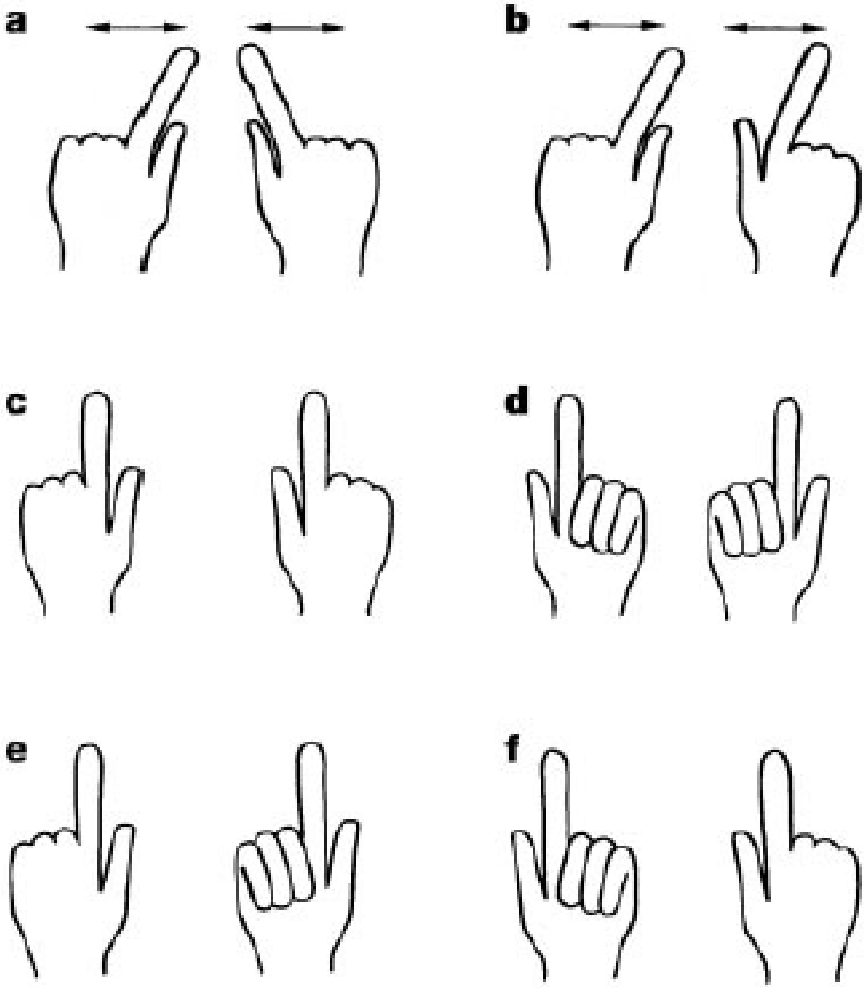
- to understand coordination patterns, we need to understand the underlying coordination dynamics
- = stabilization mechanisms
- and their strength
- from which the mean pattern emerges

What level does the instability of coordination come from?

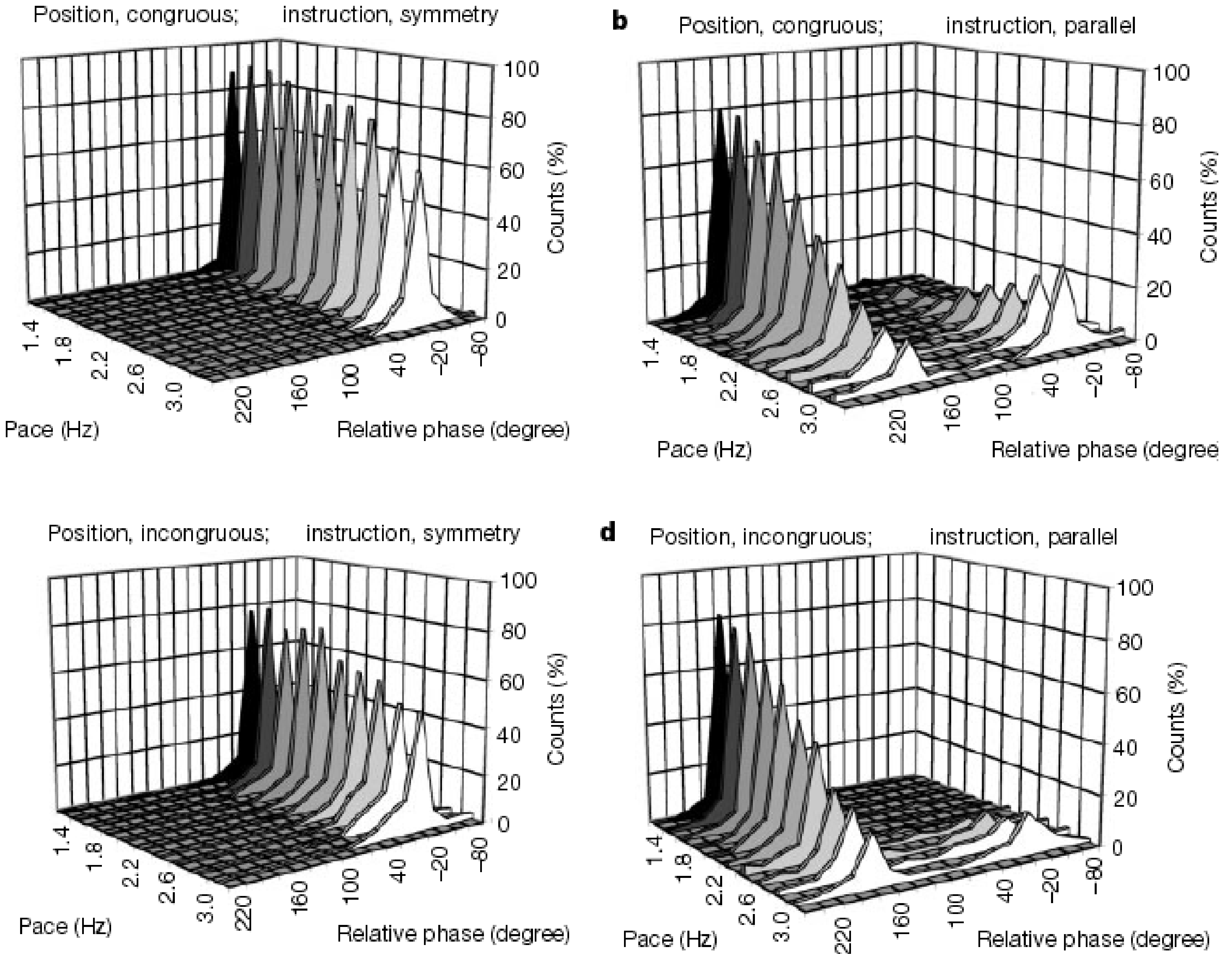
- from peripheral motor control?
- from central motor control?
- from perceptual representations of movement?

What level does instability come from?

Is the instability tied to the motor system?



Mechsner, Kerzel, Knoblich, Prinz, Nature 2001



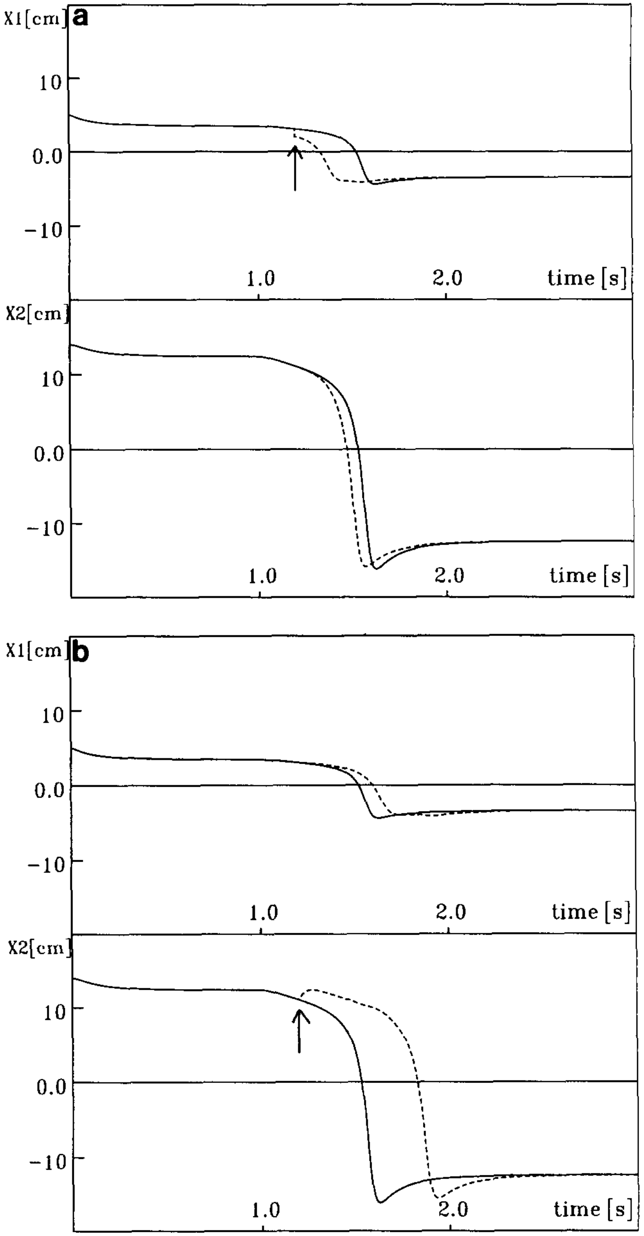
Mechsner, Kerzel, Knoblich, Prinz, Nature 2001

=> coordination in space

- rather than in effector space
- so coordinated oscillators are central
- rather than peripheral

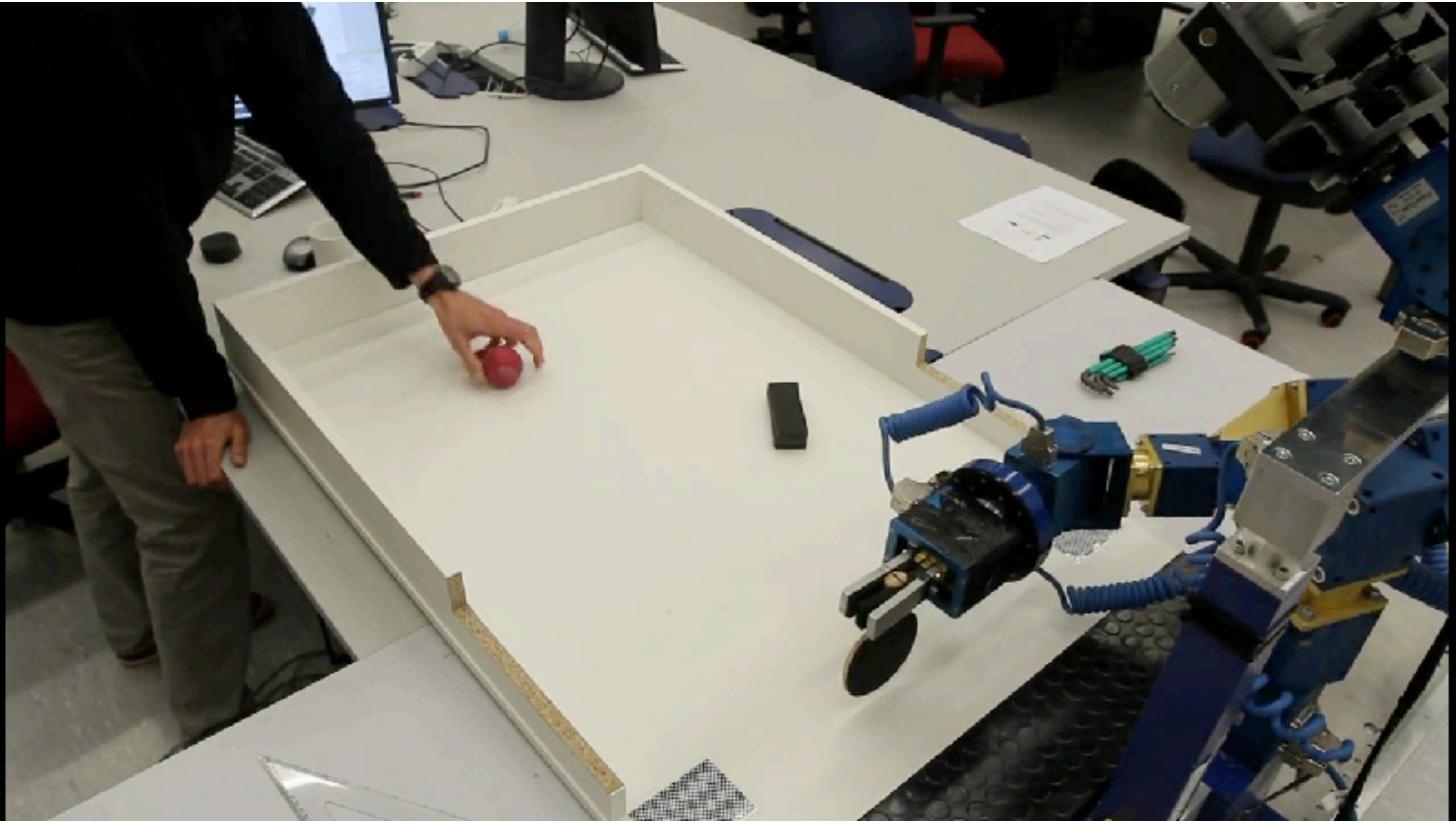
Coordination of discrete movement

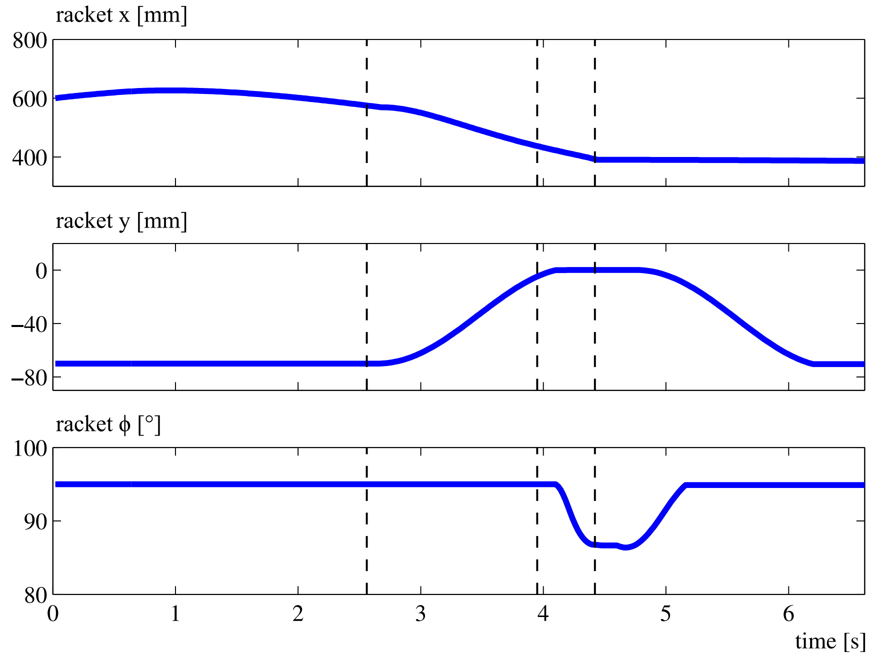
- coupling can account for coordination of discrete movement based on the idea that oscillator is “on” (stable) only for a cycle…
- back and forth components of rhythmic movement are driven by different neural populations
  - so even rhythmic movement coordination may exploit this mechanism of discrete movement coordination

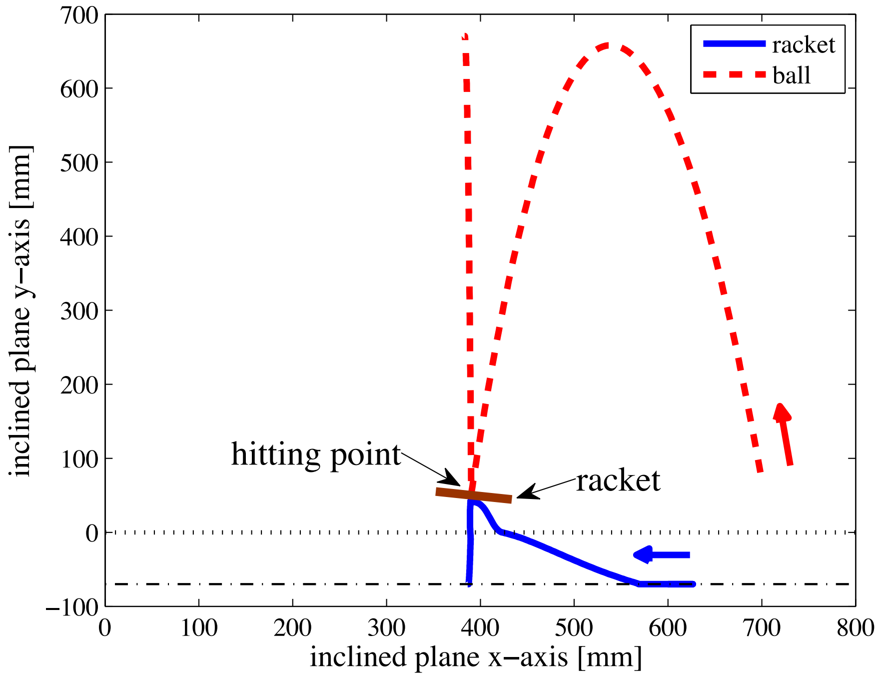


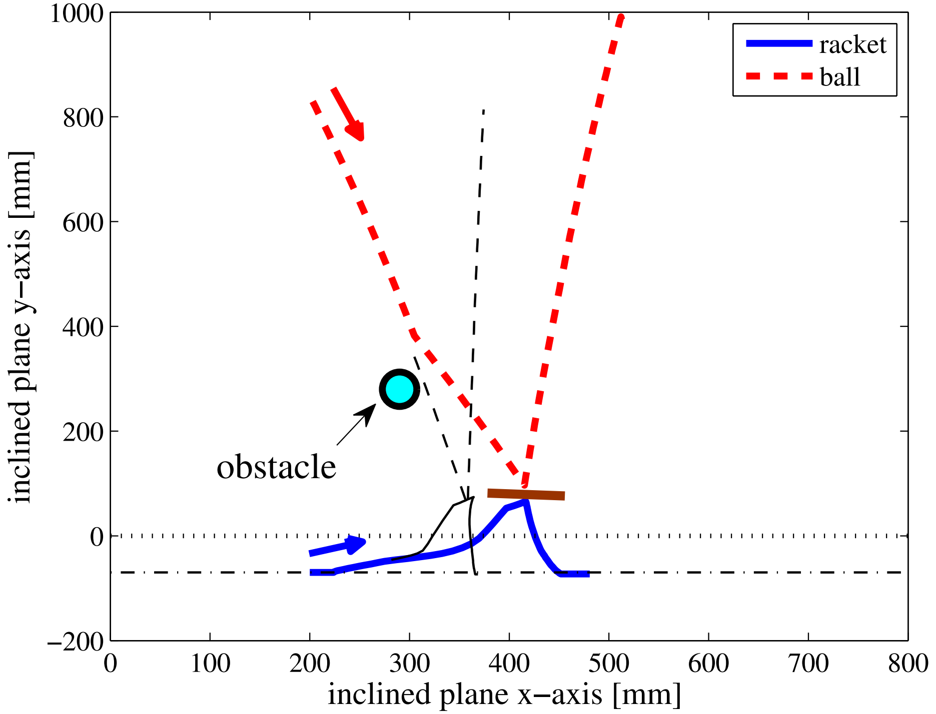
[Schöner, Biol Cybern 63:257 (1990)]

Robotic demonstration: timed movement with online updating









[Oubbati, Richter, Schöner, 2013]

… deeper issue in timing…

- contribution of the control level
    - muscles and biomechanics contribute to timing
- contribution of movement planning
    - on line updating
    - arriving "just in time"
- contribution of behavioral organization
    - timed movement sequences
    - modulating timing in rhythms
    - coarticulation