

BSCS 2019 - Neural Computation

VI - Prediction of neural activity

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- What to predict about neural activity?
- Limits of measurability in the brain
- How to build, test and improve models?

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Importance of making falsifiable predictions

- in order to assess whether our ideas about neural representations, formalised in models are any good, we have to be able to compare them to actual data from physiological experiments
- strictly speaking, we cannot confirm the validity of a model, only reject it, if it's outright false about something we measure
- so the way to go is to squeeze out as many predictions about the models regarding phenomena we do have measurements about as possible
- we can also compare models in terms of predictive accuracy
- if we indeed falsify a prediction of a model, it doesn't (necessarily) mean that we did something wrong - we learn that some of the assumptions we made when building the model were not accurate

Hierarchy of hypotheses about the brain

Neural dynamics



predictions about
neural time series

Neural representation

Sampling hypothesis



predictions about
neural response
distribution

Learning feature statistics

Probabilistic representation



predictions about
behaviour

Unity of the mental model



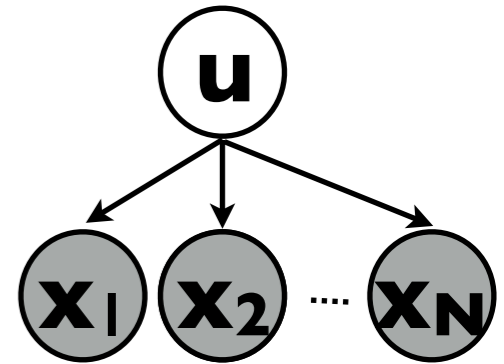
predictions about
transfer of knowledge

Using a specific model for prediction

- handling multiple observations in a graphical model

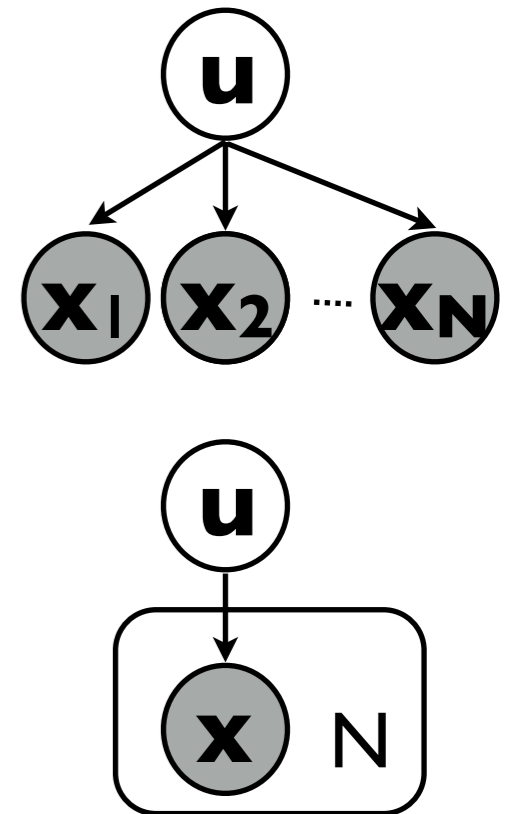
Using a specific model for prediction

- handling multiple observations in a graphical model
 - if we have several observations about the same variable, we would have to introduce each one of them as an independent observed value in the model - this would lead to giant models



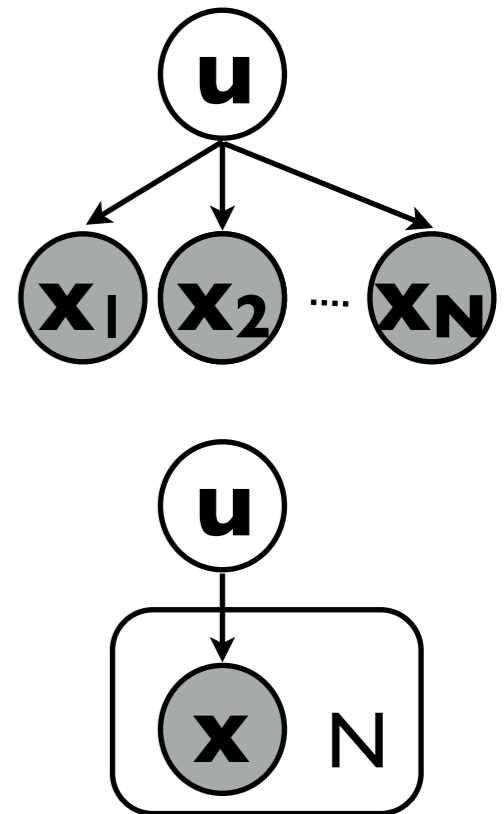
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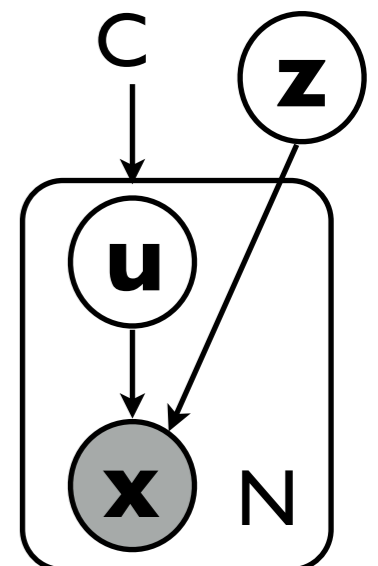
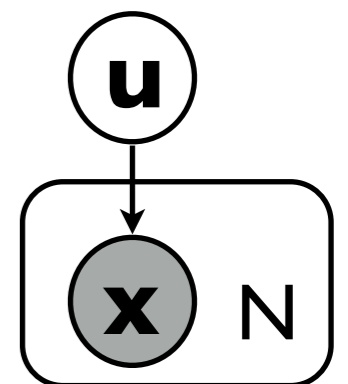
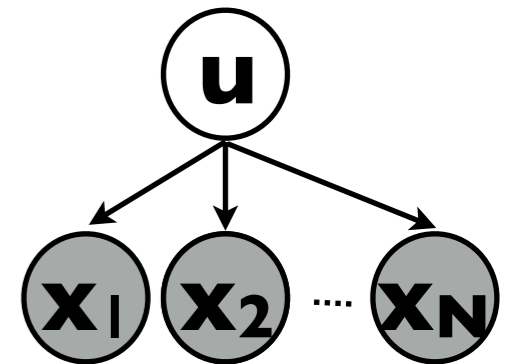
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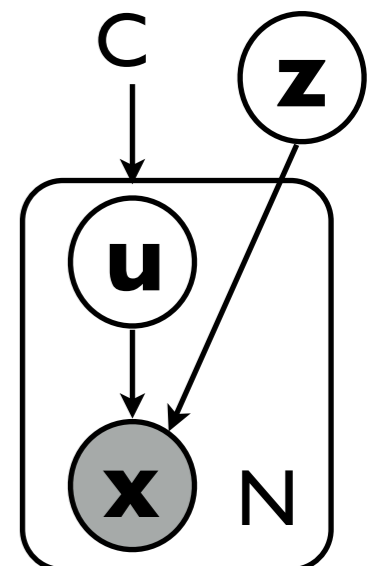
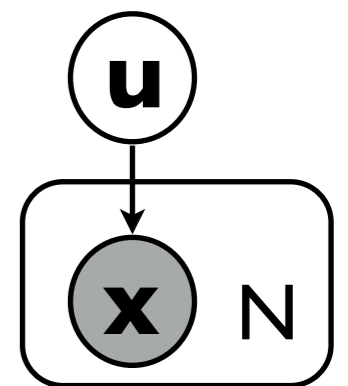
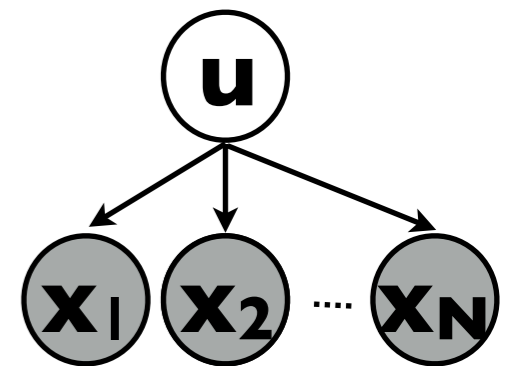
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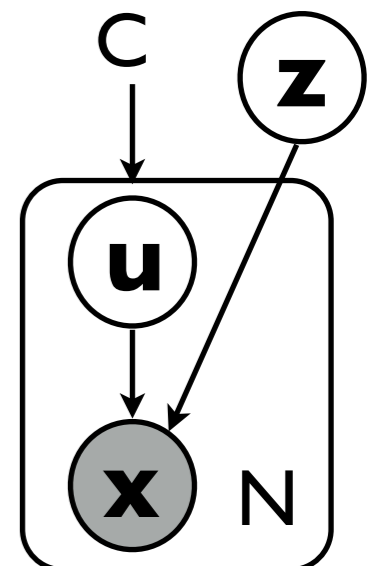
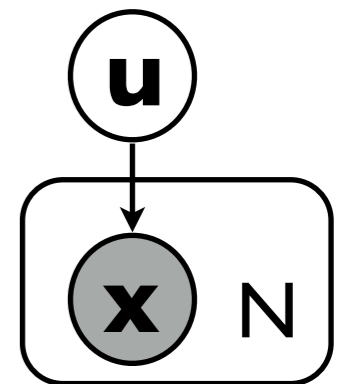
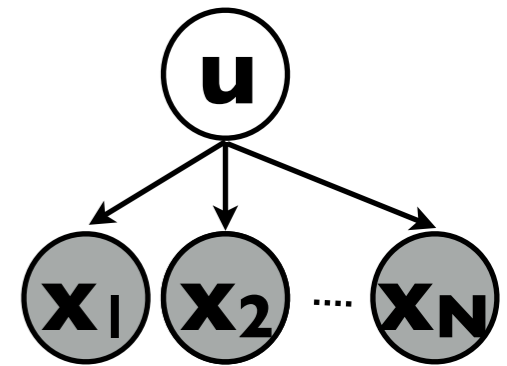
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- but we can produce predictions about how the response should change if the stimulus changes - and this is falsifiable



Functional intuition about brain regions

- in order to formalise a probabilistic model about what kind of inference a certain brain region implements, we have to have an idea about the computational problem it solves
 - the easiest targets of such intuition are sensory cortices
 - the visual cortex needs to perform object recognition
 - auditory cortex has to perform localisation & separation of sound sources
- this intuition suggests a formal computation that solves the same problem

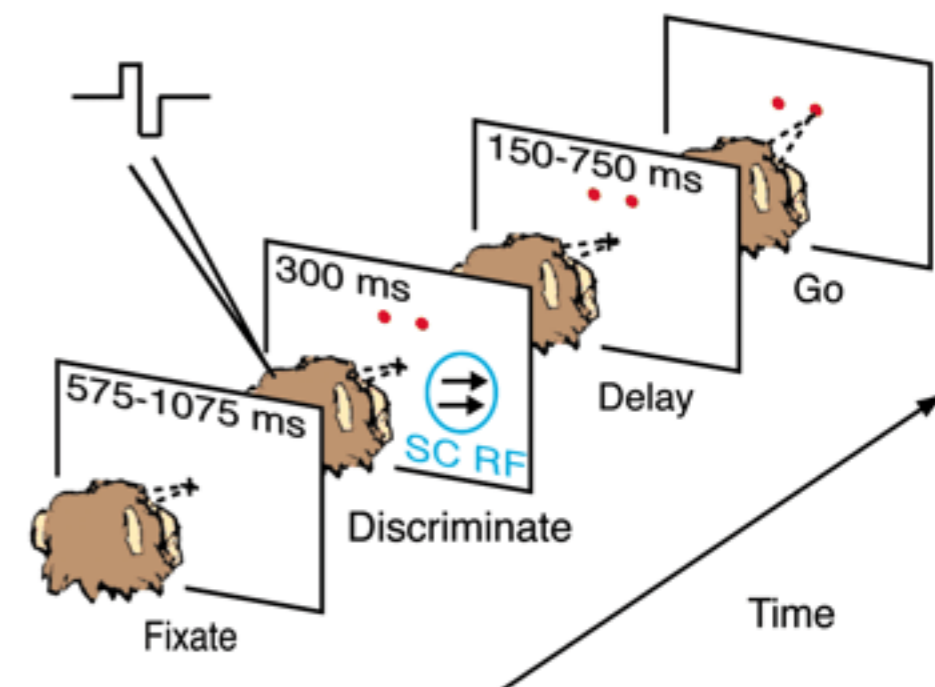
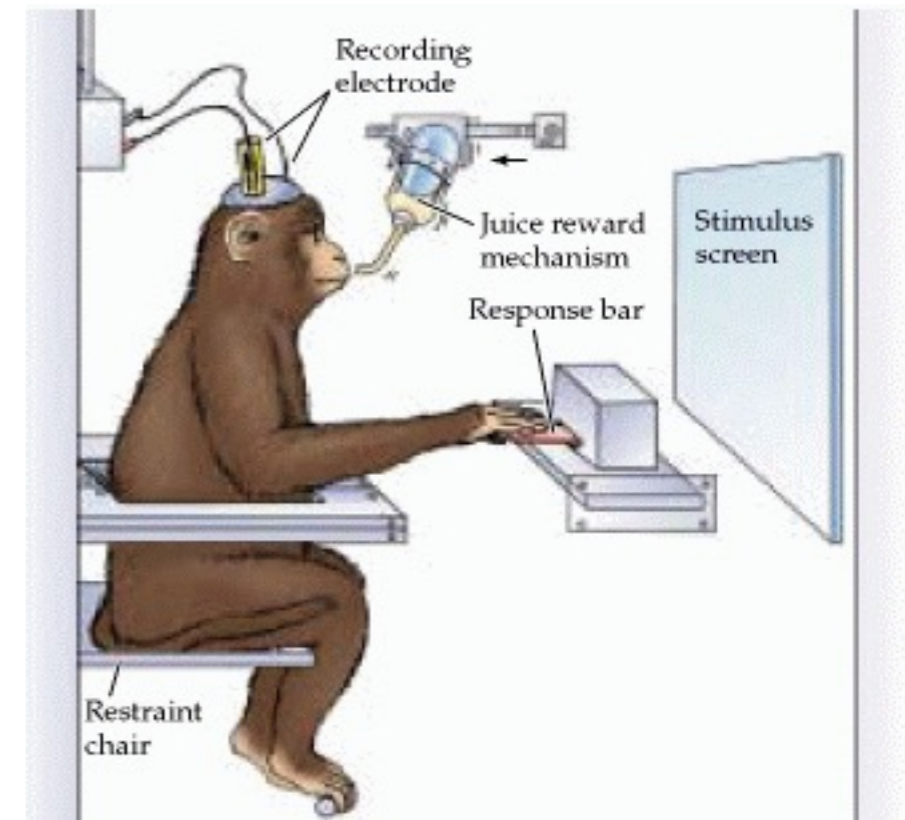
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Three aspects of resolution of measurement techniques

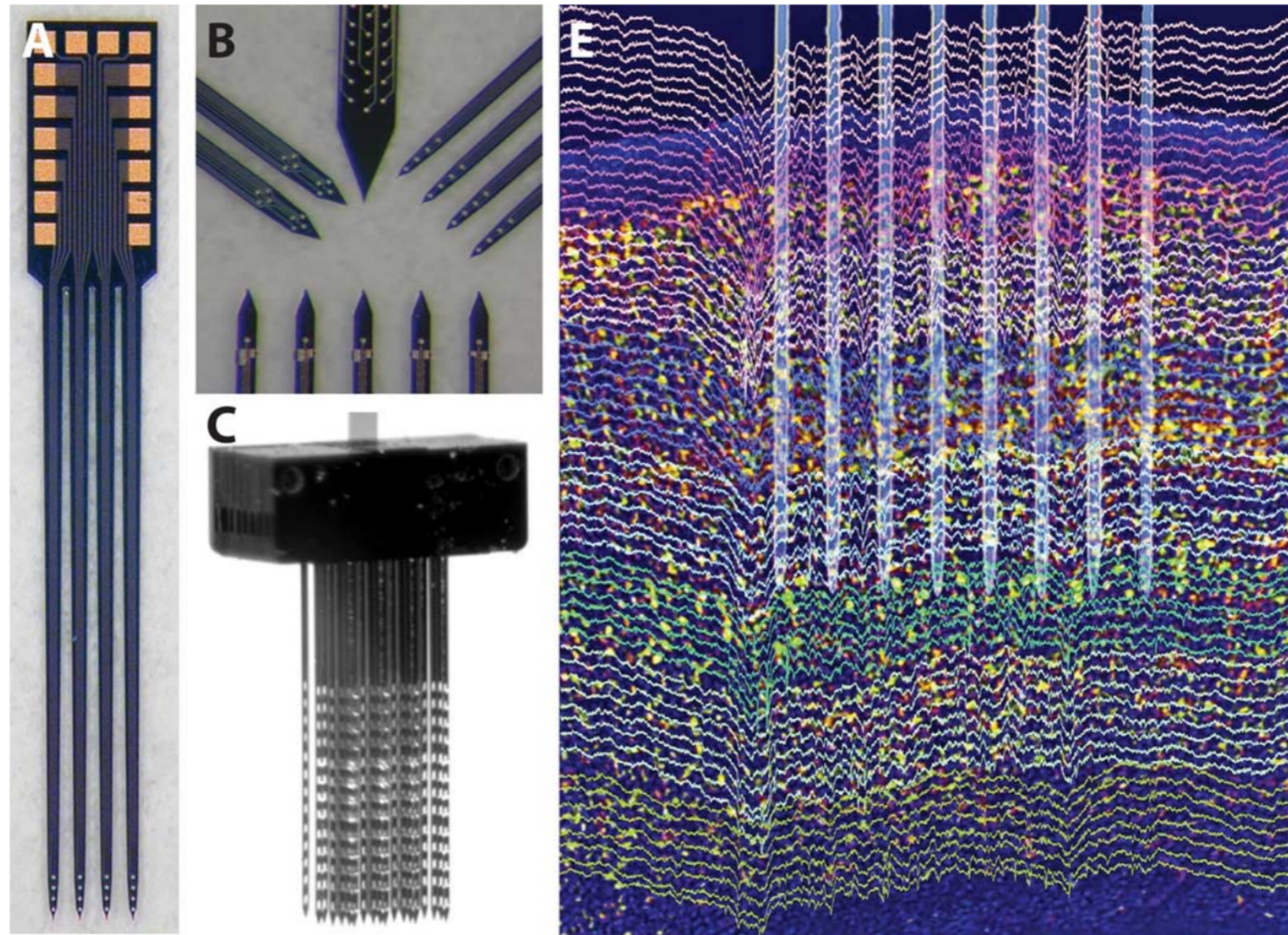
- spatial - how small is the volume in which we can measure the neural activity separately from the rest of the brain?
 - EEG is very bad at this
 - fMRI is better, but still far from seeing individual cells
- temporal - how long does it take to make one measurement of the neural activity?
 - fMRI is very slow
 - electrophysiological methods are very good at this
- coverage - what portion of the whole brain can we monitor at the same time?
 - patch-clamp can only measure one cell
 - multielectrode arrays are better, but still only a couple of hundreds maximum
 - same with calcium imaging

Measuring from a behaving animal

- in an experiment with sensory cortex measurements, we have to control the stimulus the animal receives at each moment
 - in vision, we have to know what exactly the animal sees - not easy, as eyes move all the time
- one attempt to solve this is anaesthesia - primary sensory cortices keep working even if the animal is unconscious
 - but the anaesthetics have various, not completely known effects on the response distribution of neurons - results are not completely comparable to awake studies
- another possibility is training the animal to perform a task in which it has to fixate on the same point
 - only monkeys will do this, not cats or rats



Microelectrode arrays

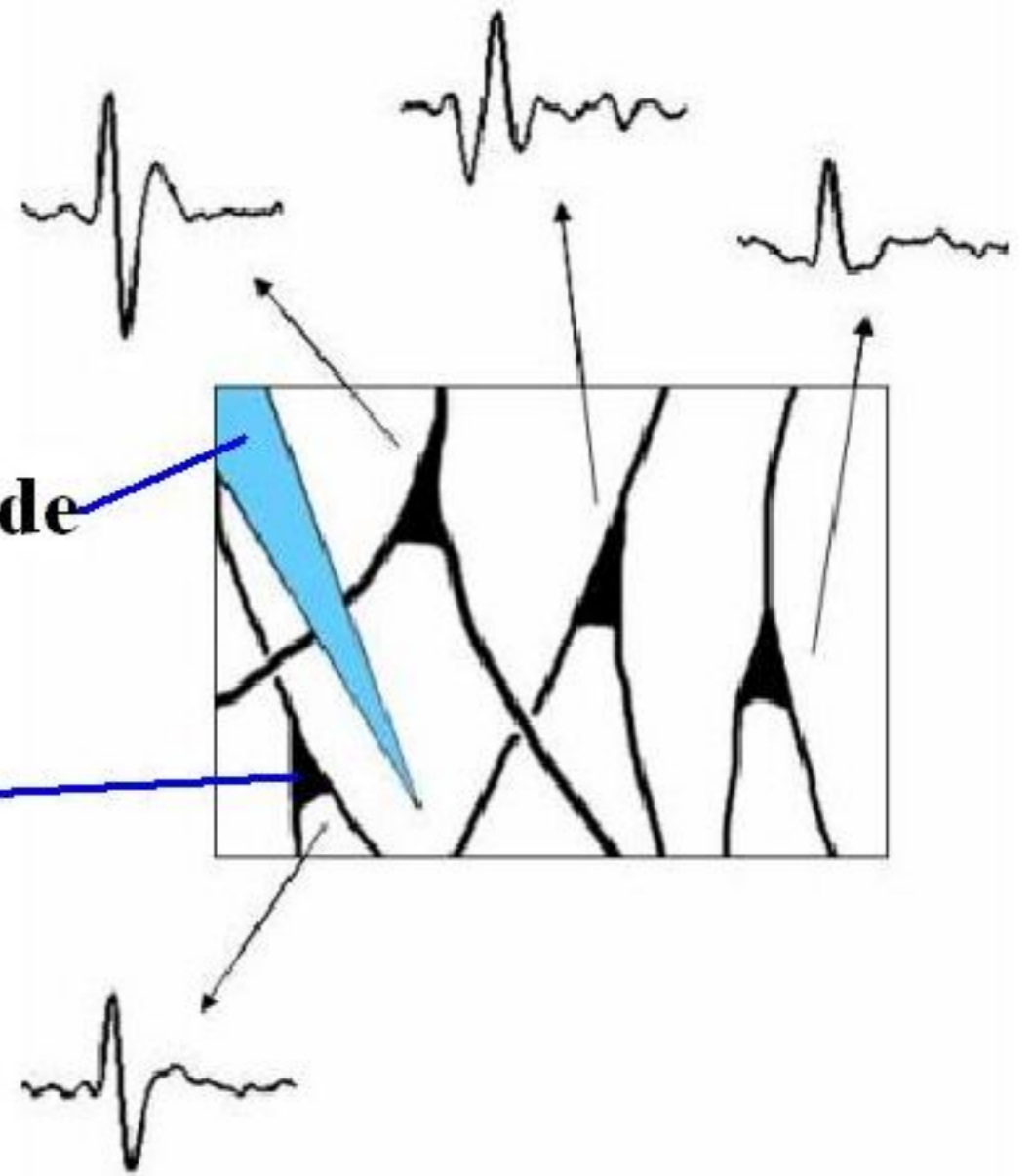


Extracellular recording

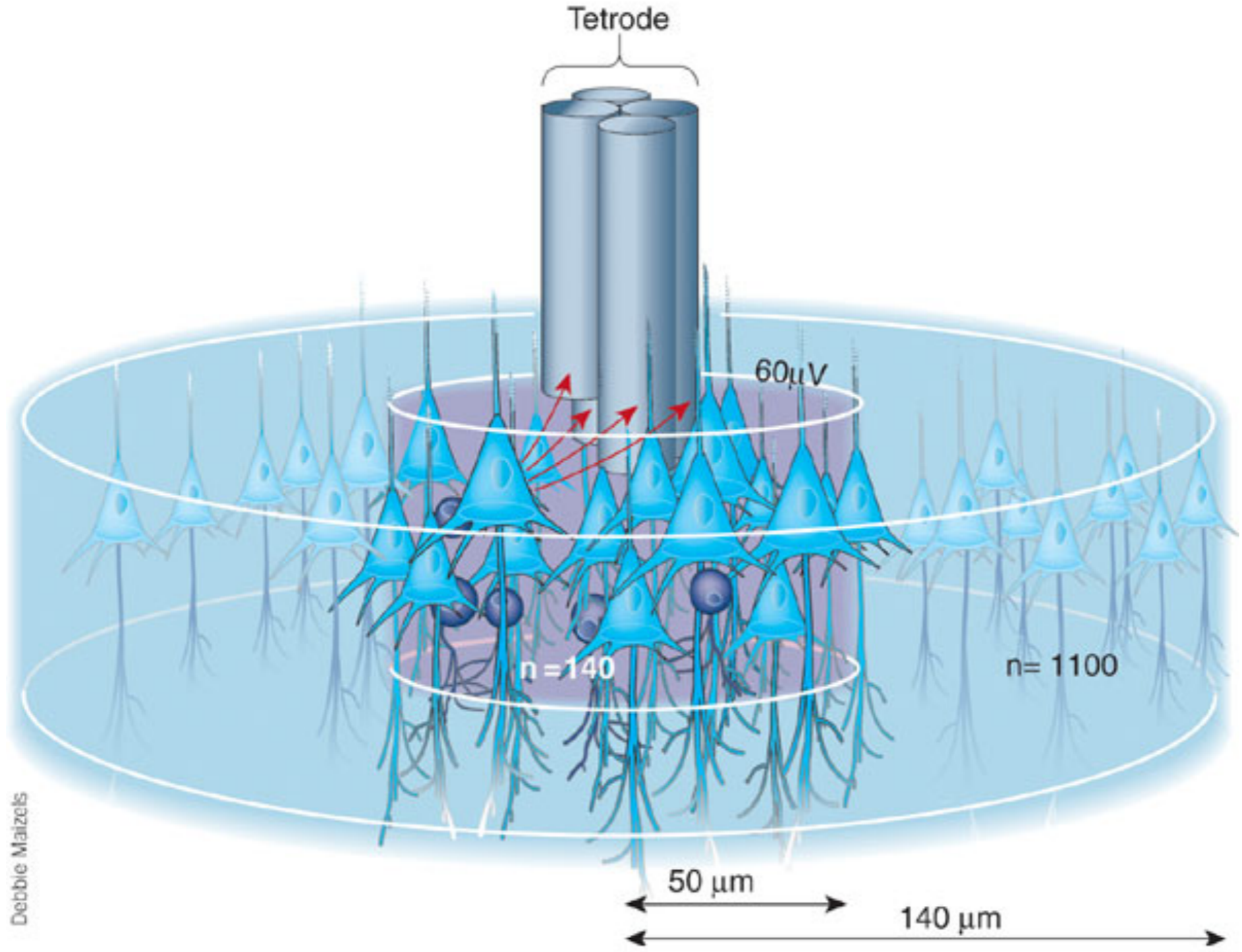


Microelectrode

Neuron



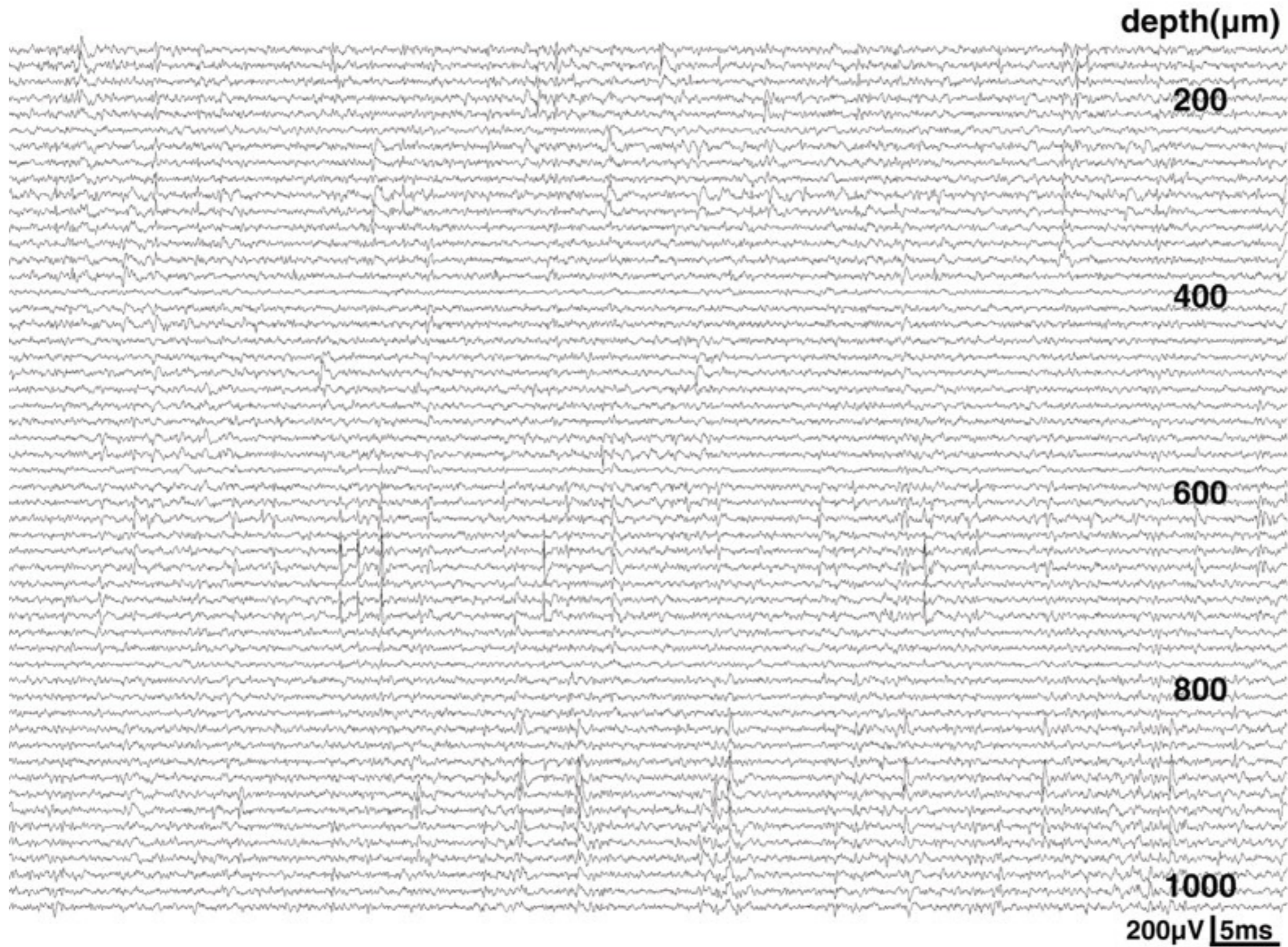
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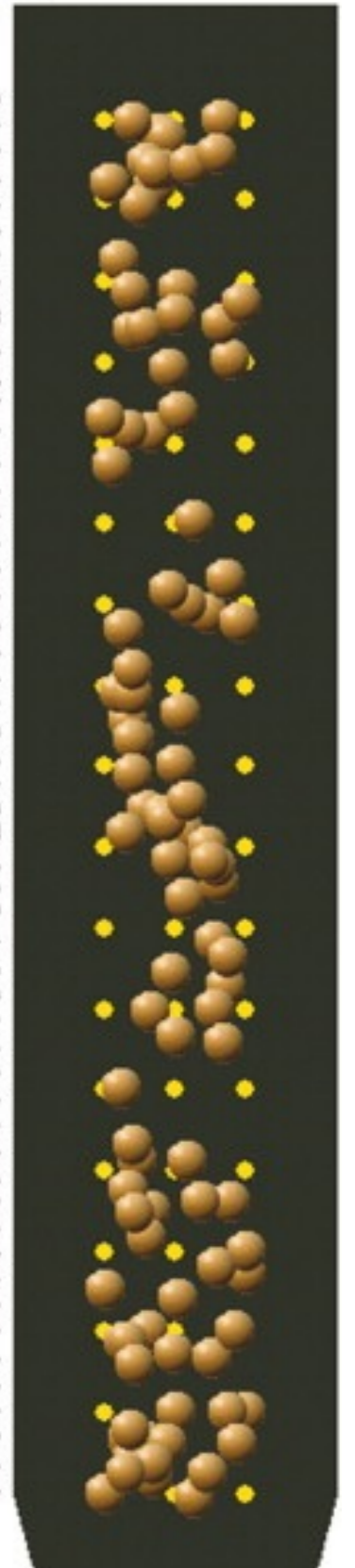
Debbie Maizels

extracell recording

A

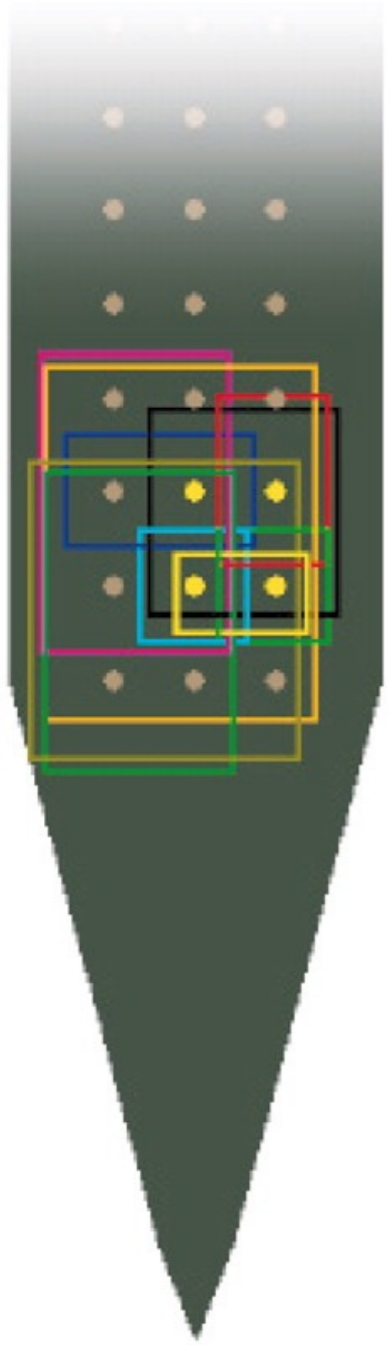


B

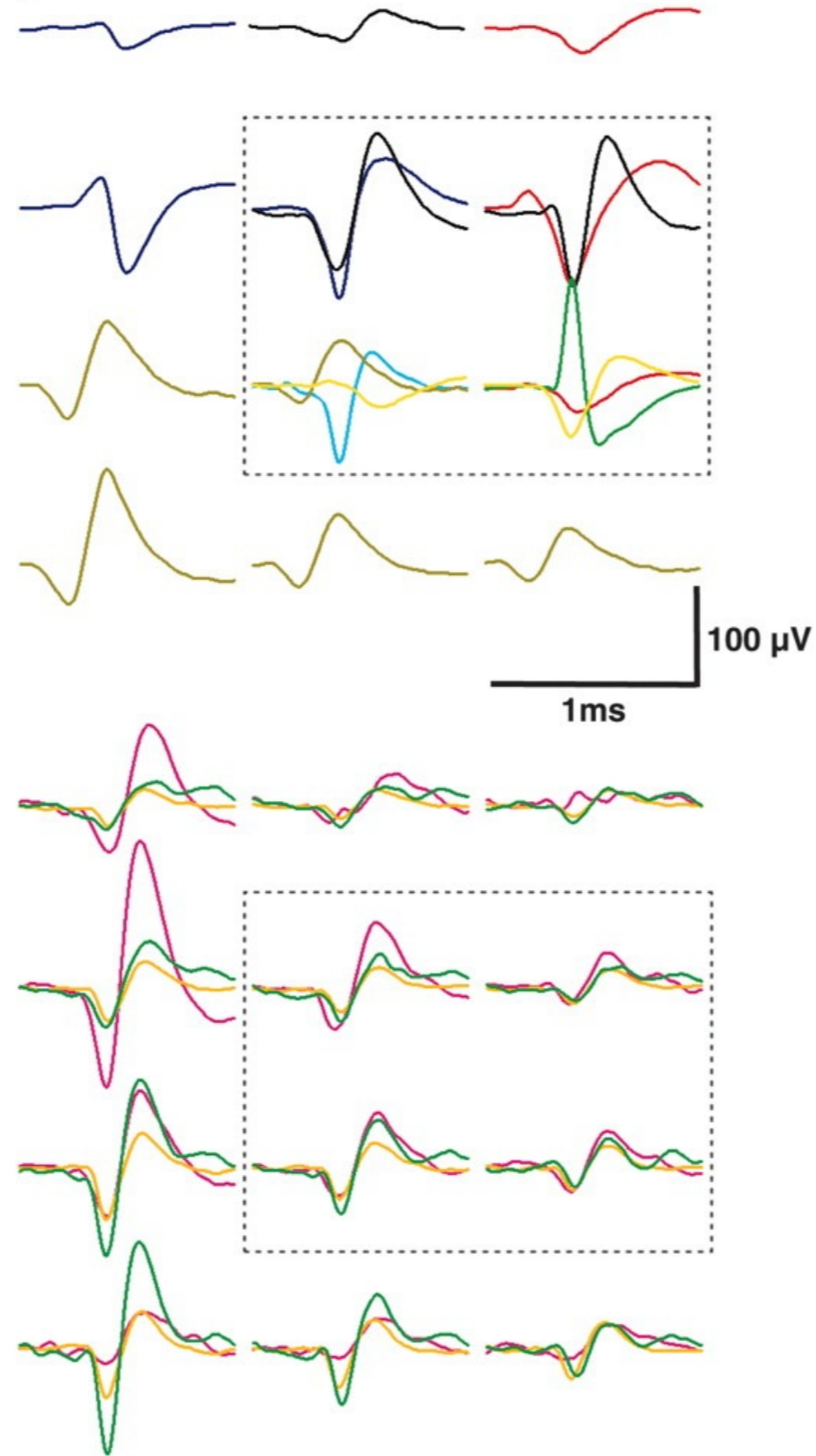


Spike sorting

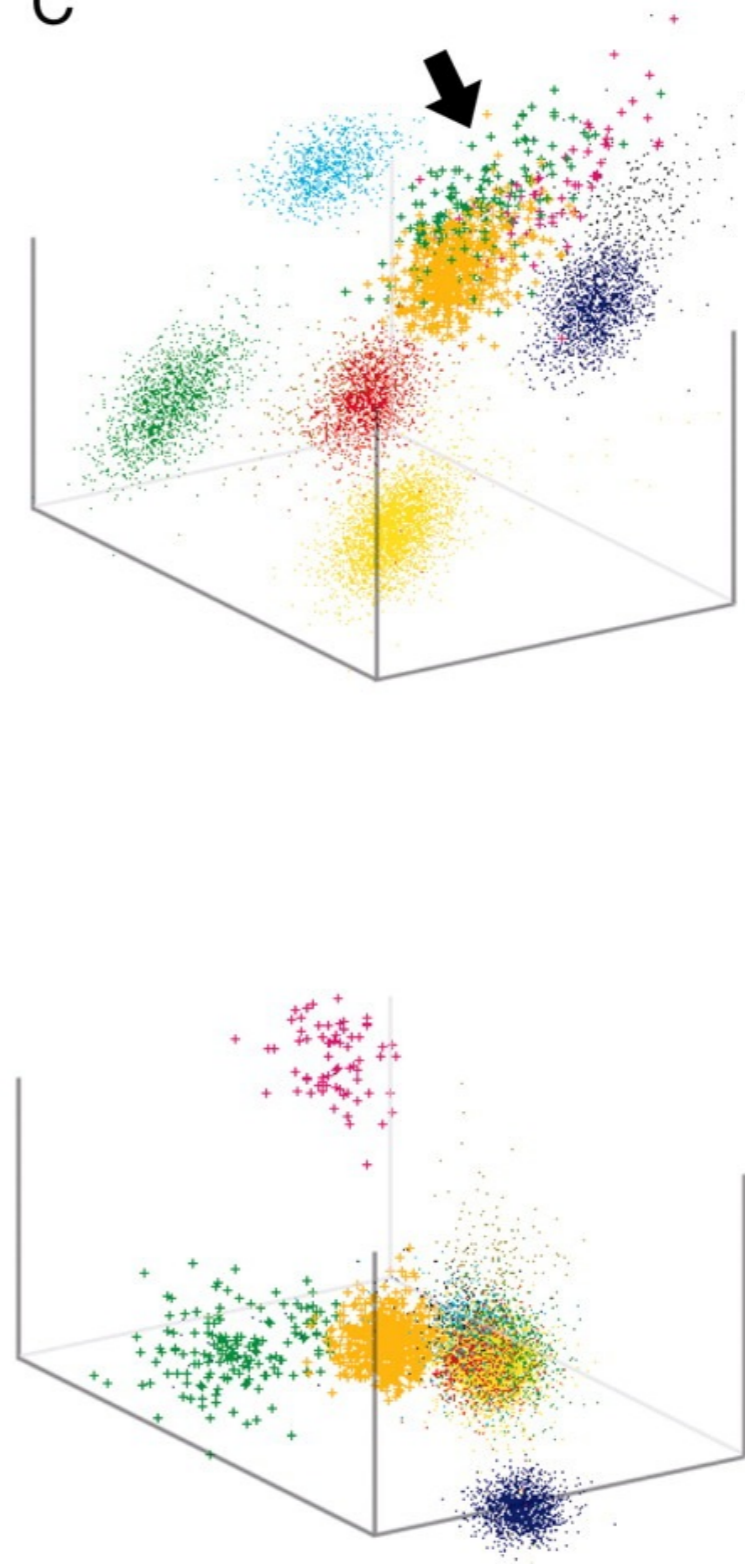
A



B



C

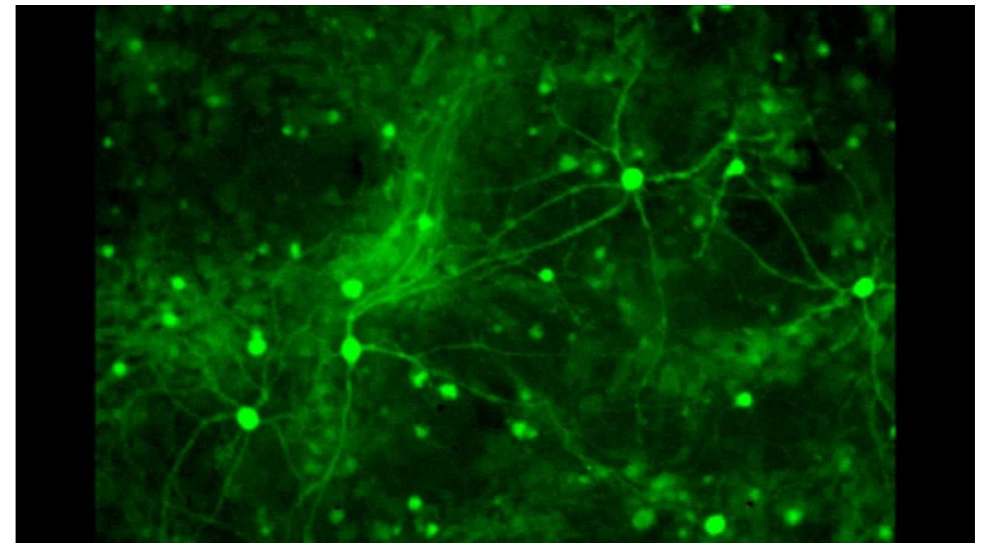


Spike sorting

- Manual and automatic methods to sort measured spikes into clusters that are assumed to correspond to cells
- Hard to evaluate the algorithms as there is little ground truth data
 - Technically quite difficult to measure simultaneously with extracellular electrodes and patch clamps from the same cells
- Introduces a noise of largely unknown properties

Calcium imaging

- genetically modified cells express fluorescent proteins that respond to the binding of calcium
- calcium levels in a cell change when spikes are generated
- the activity of cells can be recorded using fluorescent microscopy
- the calcium signal is slow - we can only tell whether there were any spikes in a certain time bin
- getting back the spike train for a cell is an inference problem
- we can sacrifice temporal resolution to record more cells up to ~ 10000



What kind of signals can we measure?

- How many cells at once - spatial scale
 - one ion channel -> whole brain
- With what level of detail - spatial resolution
 - one ion channel -> whole brain
- Temporal resolution
 - 20 kHz -> 1 Hz
- Trade-offs everywhere
- Neural population measurement with microscopic resolution from a behaving animal
 - ~100-1000 cells, depending on the temporal resolution, only spike trains

Publicly available datasets

- Many different datasets in the CRCNS database
- Some researchers make data available, e.g. Matthias Bethge



The screenshot shows the CRCNS website interface. At the top, the title is "CRCNS – Collaborative Research in Computational Neuroscience – Data sharing". Below the title is a navigation menu with buttons for "Home", "News", "Data Sets", "Download", "Marketplace", "Forum", and "About". A breadcrumb trail indicates "You are here: Home → Data Sets". The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column, titled "Navigation", lists several brain regions with folder icons: Visual cortex, Auditory cortex, frontal cortex, Prefrontal Cortex (PFC), Motor cortex, Somatosensory cortex, Orbitofrontal cortex (ofc), and Hippocampus. The right column, titled "Data Sets", contains the text "The following folders contain data sets of the specified type" followed by a list of folders: Visual cortex, Auditory cortex, frontal cortex, Prefrontal Cortex (PFC), and Motor cortex. Each folder name in the right column is underlined.

Pointer

<http://bethgelab.org/datasets/v1gratings/>

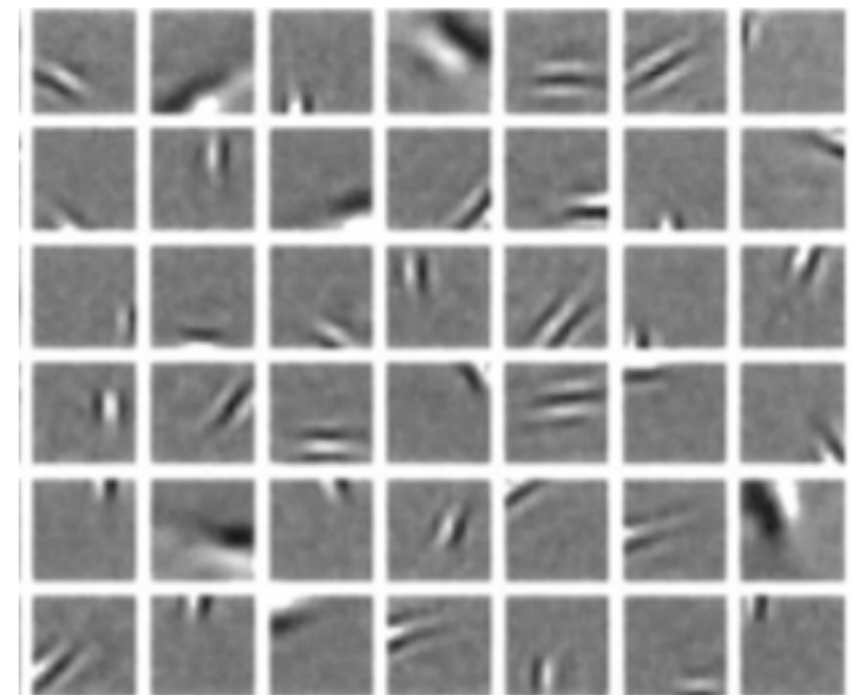
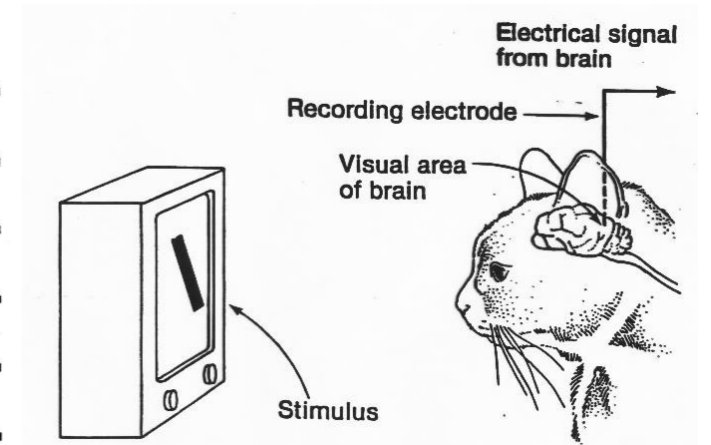
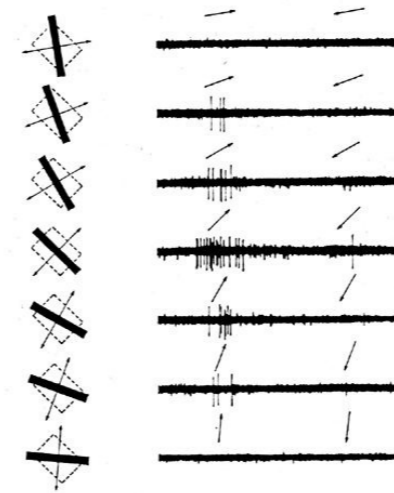
Pointer

<http://crcns.org/>

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Computation in the primary visual cortex

- in electrode recordings we can see that a lot of cells in V1 respond to bar segments placed in specific locations in the visual field
 - the strength of the response depends on how the bar is oriented
 - the **receptive field** of the cell is a localised, oriented edge
- these cells act like edge detectors
- their response can be crudely approximated by multiplying the stimulus with an edge filter



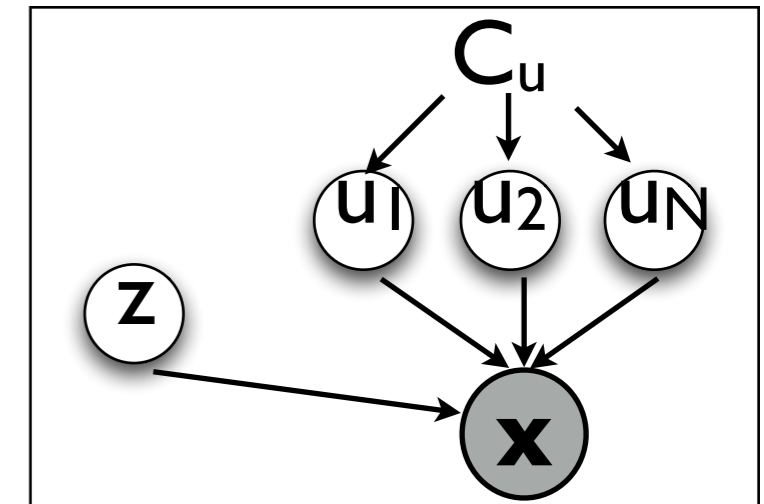
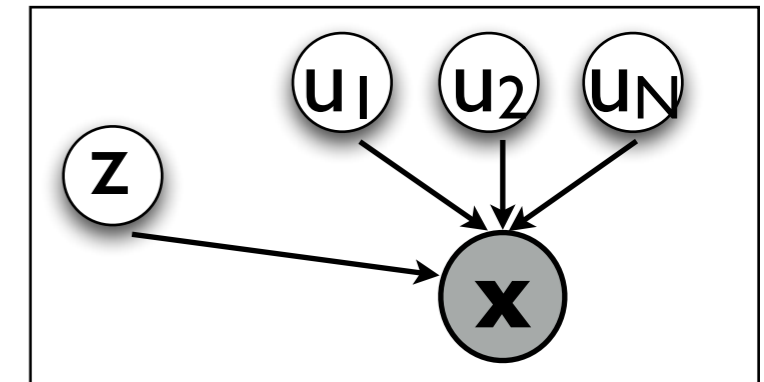
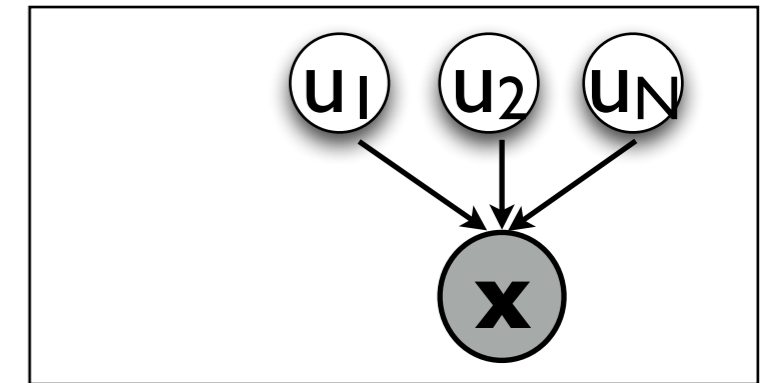
Modelling the variability of neural responses

- Can we relate it to perceptual uncertainty?



Step-by-step building of the graphical model of vision

- V1 responses are predicted by independent contributions of localised oriented edges to the stimulus
- stimulus content is independent of lighting conditions, thus contrast should be an independent modulation of the edge combinations
- As edges define object contours, they do not appear independently - a covariance matrix needs to be learned for them.



“Never attribute to stupidity that which is adequately explained by unstated assumptions.”

Geert Bollen

Pointer

<http://xcorr.net/2015/11/20/turing-machines-the-number-game-and-inference/>

Contrast-normalised models of V1

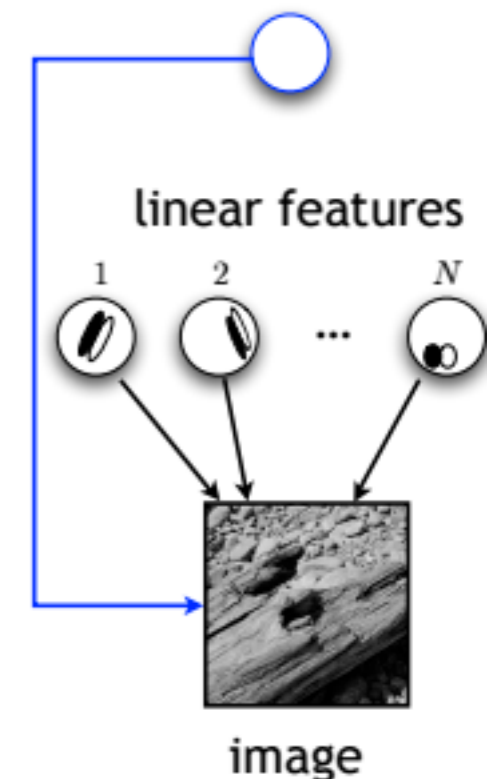
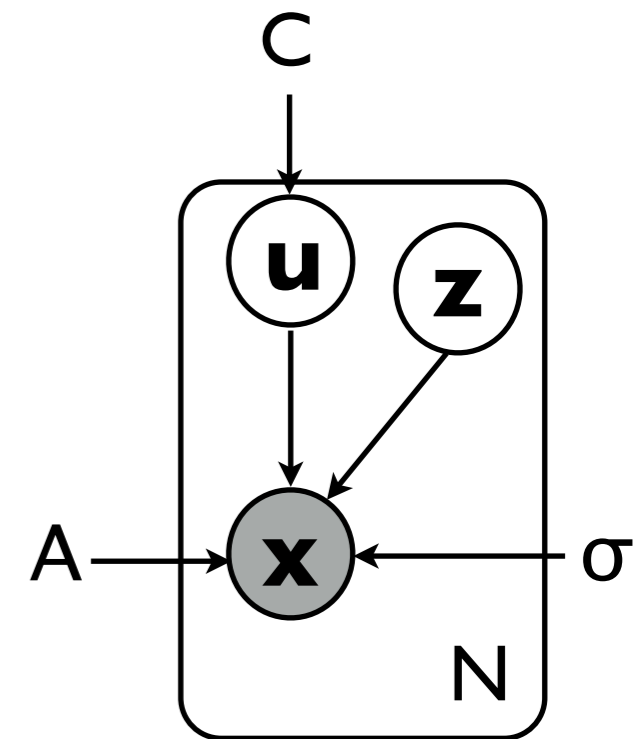
- the observed variable \mathbf{x} encodes the pixels of a black&white image - an approximation of retinal rod sensor activations
- hidden variable \mathbf{u} encodes how strongly specific localised edges contribute to the composition of the image - we will use this to predict the membrane potential of V1 neurons
- hidden variable \mathbf{z} encodes the contrast of the image
- called Gaussian scale mixture models

$$P(\mathbf{u}) = \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{u}; \mathbf{0}, \mathbf{C})$$

$$P(z) = \text{Gamma}(z; k, \theta)$$

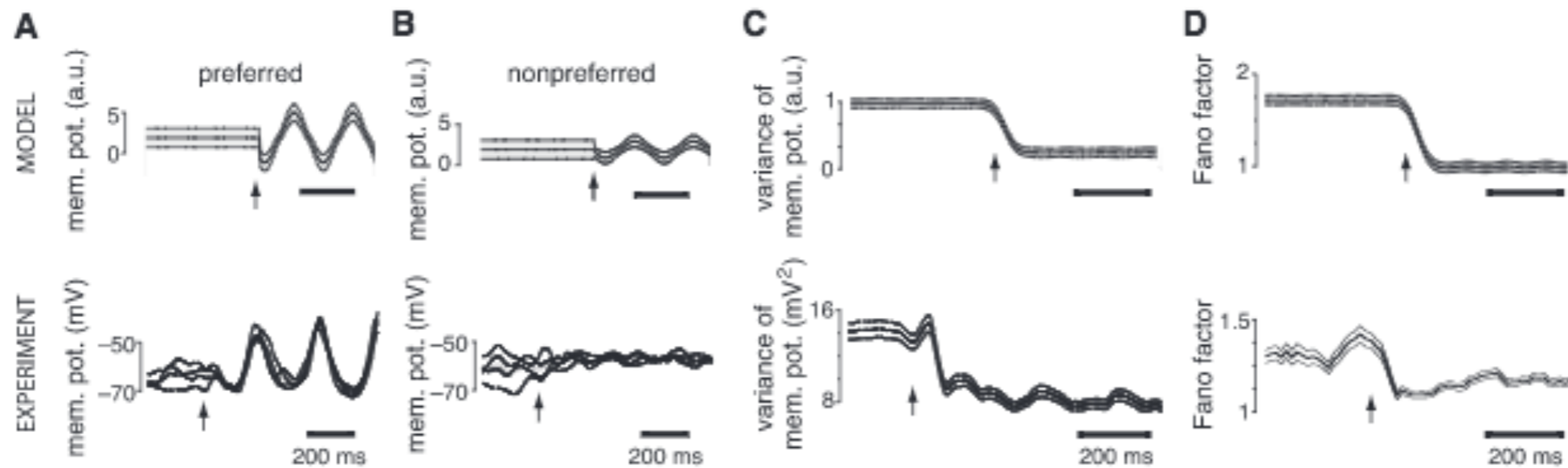
$$p(\mathbf{x} | \mathbf{u}, z) = \mathcal{N}(\mathbf{x}; zA\mathbf{u}, \sigma^2 I)$$

$$\text{image} = \text{contrast} \times (a_1 \text{feature}_1 + a_2 \text{feature}_2 + \dots + a_N \text{feature}_N + \text{noise})$$



GSM predictions

- How do neural activations change with stimulus contrast?



Orbán et al, 2016,
Neuron



Spontaneous and
evoked activity

GSM predictions

- How does neural spiking change with stimulus contrast?

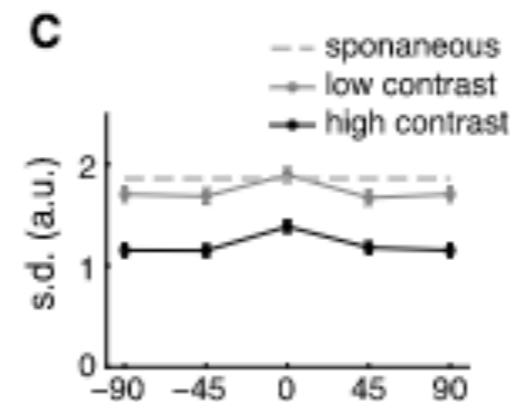
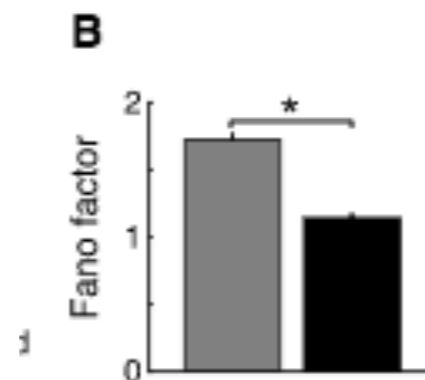


Orbán et al, 2016,
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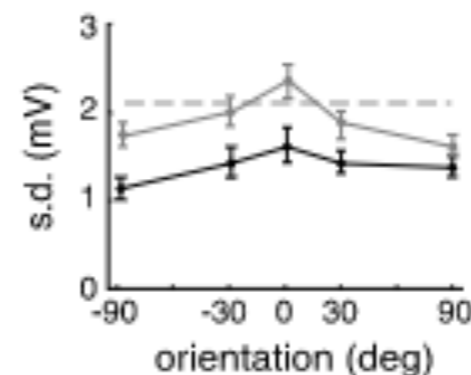
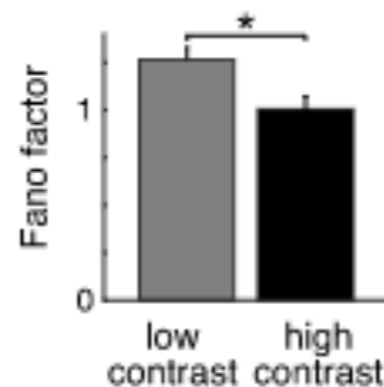
GSM predictions

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Orbán et al, 2016,
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Response variance at different
contrast levels



Hierarchy of hypotheses about the brain

Neural dynamics



predictions about
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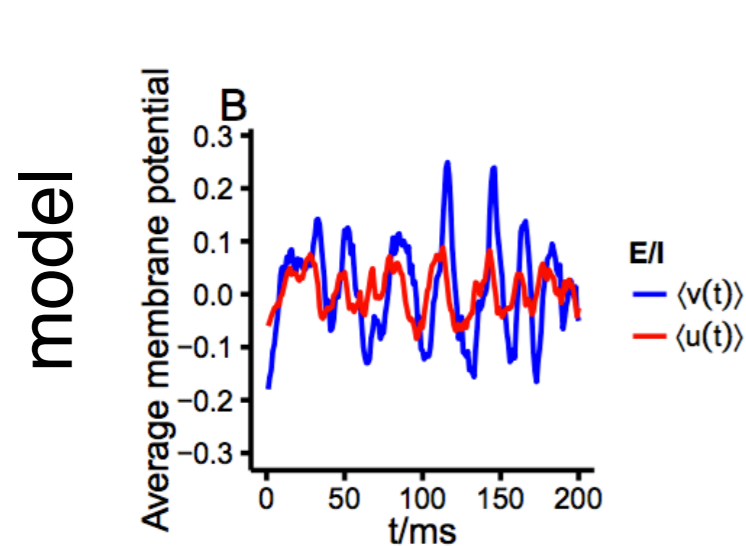


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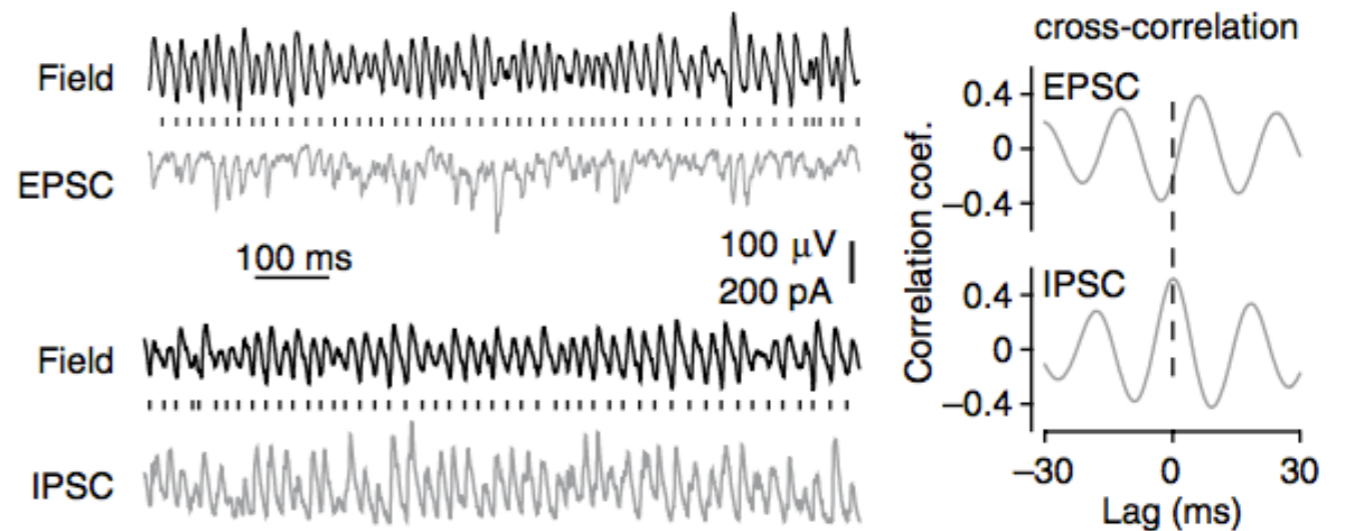
Moving towards the implementation level

- With the GSM model, we made predictions on the algorithmic level of abstraction, as we showed that evoked responses are compatible with probabilistic inference
- In order to really move to the implementation level, additional to the generative model, we have to assume a specific inference algorithm too
- Such an algorithm may give predictions not only about properties of response distributions, but actual time series of neural membrane potentials, that can be compared to measurements
- The sampling hypothesis suggests that the inference algorithm will be one that produces samples from the posterior distribution of the latent variables
- There are many such sampling algorithms with different properties, we choose one that is efficient and lends itself to implementation with neural networks

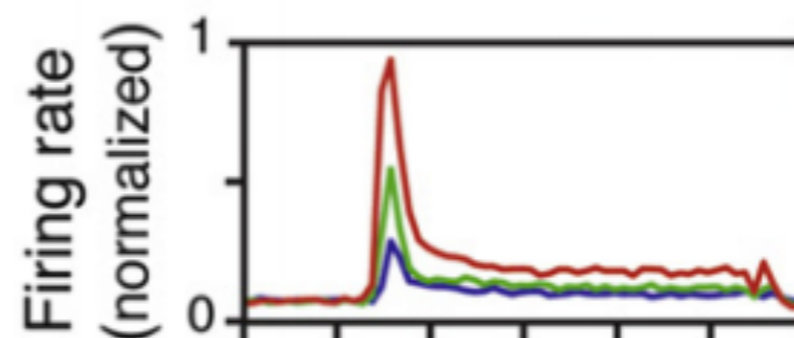
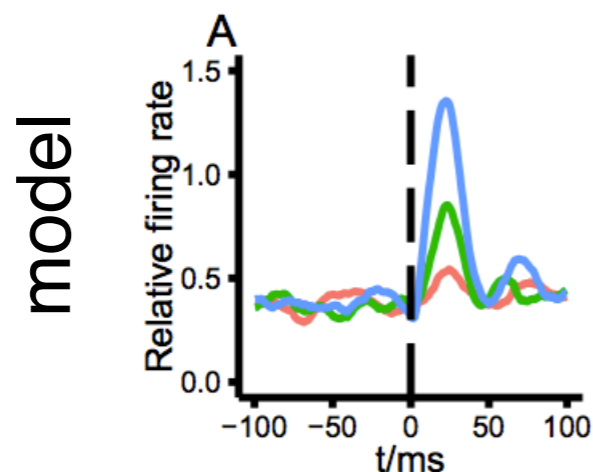
Measurement time series predictions with GSM



measurement
Ray & Maunsell, 2010



- implementation of an efficient sampling algorithm by a biophysically realistic neural network model
- inhibitory and excitatory subpopulations exhibit oscillatory dynamics at different amplitudes, and are shifted in phase relative to each other
- stimulus onset evokes a transient increase in firing rates



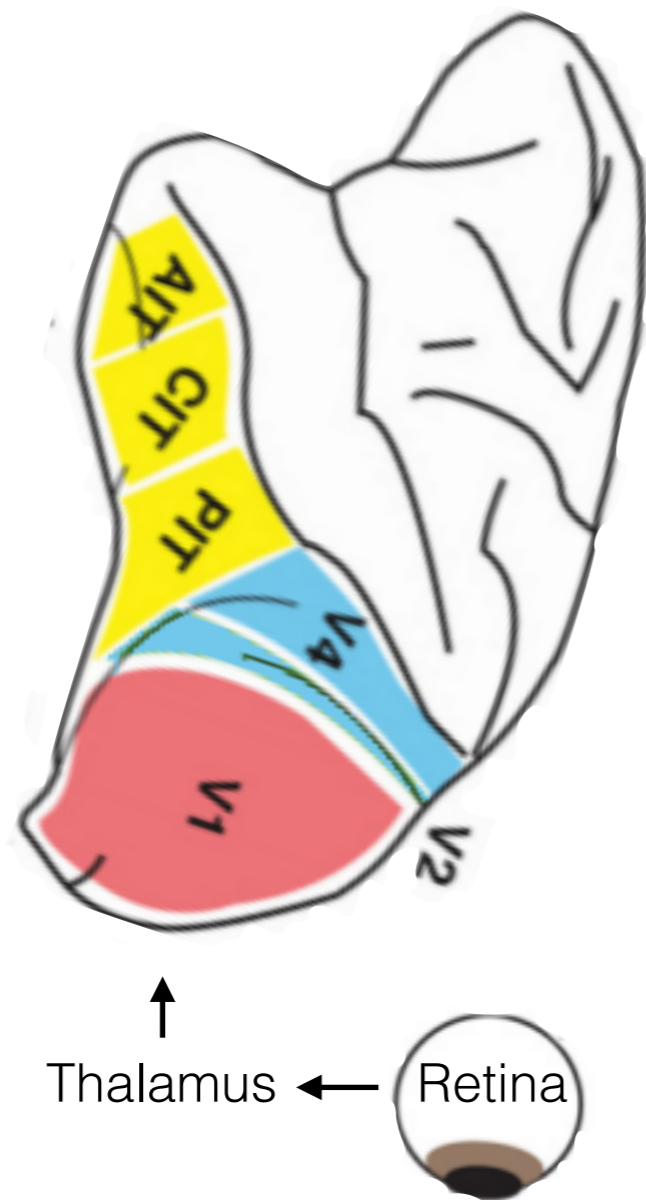
measurement
Mann & Mody, 2010

Modelling the correlation structure of neural responses

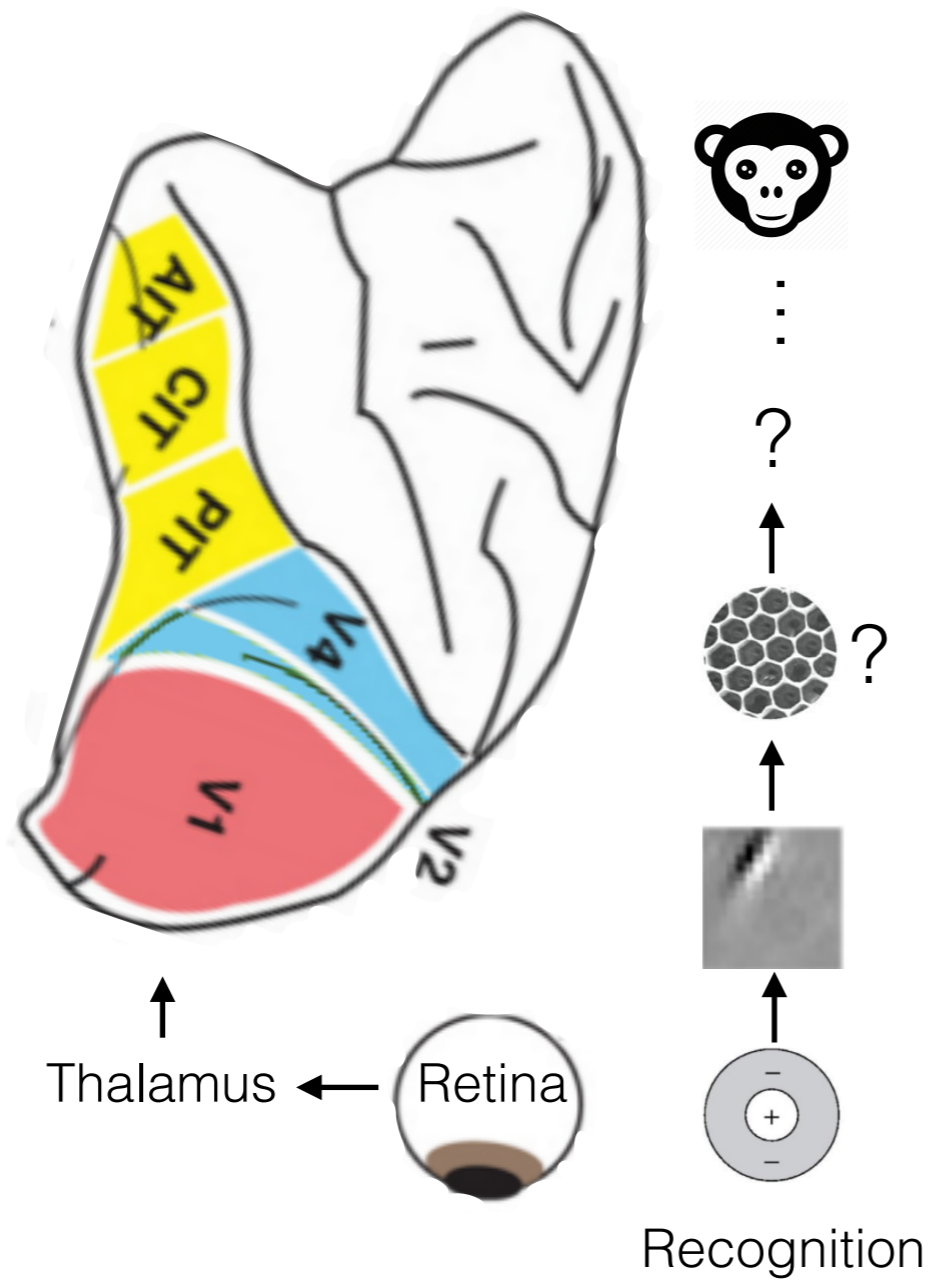
- Can we relate it to perceptual context?



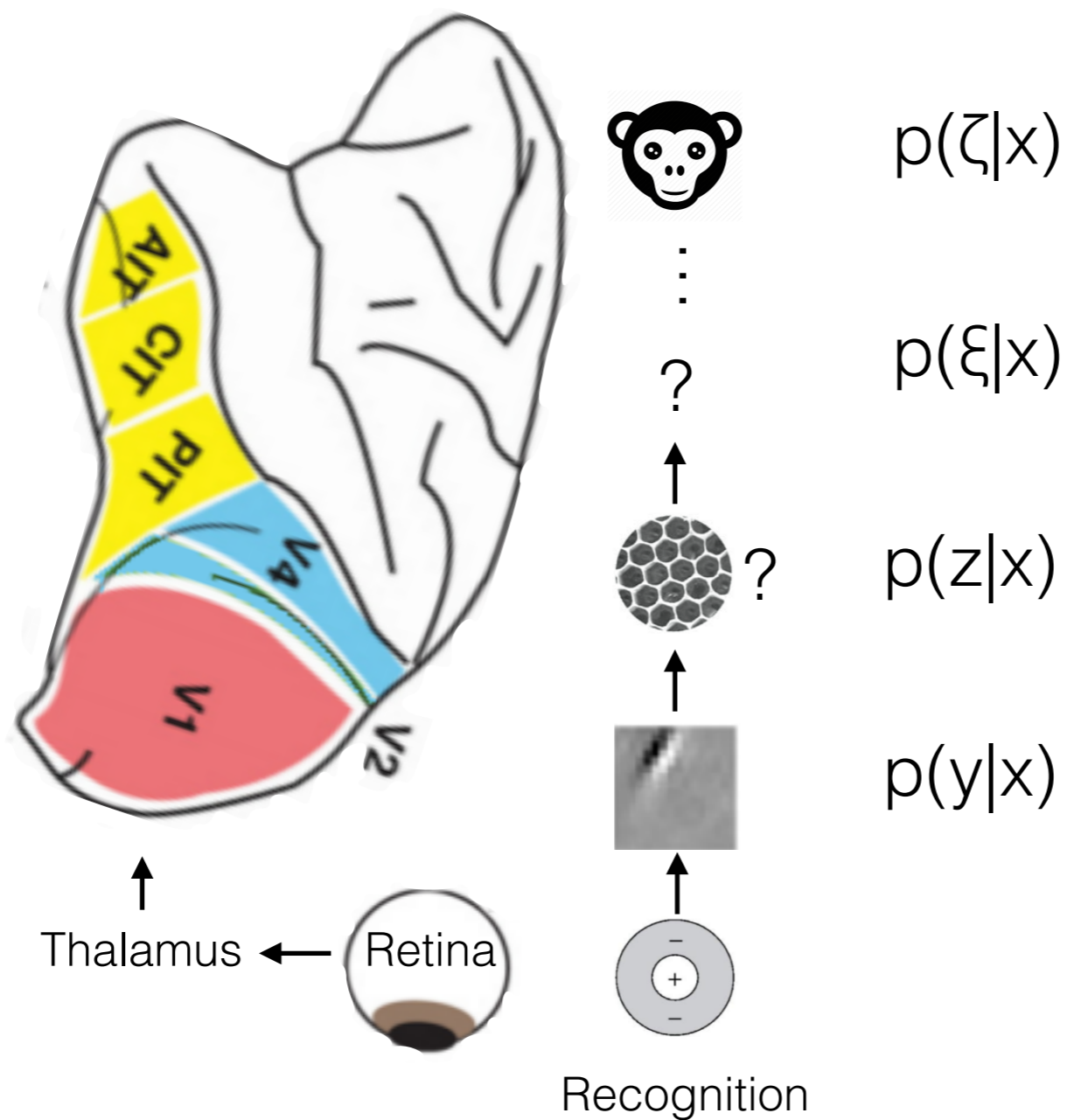
Perception as hierarchical inference



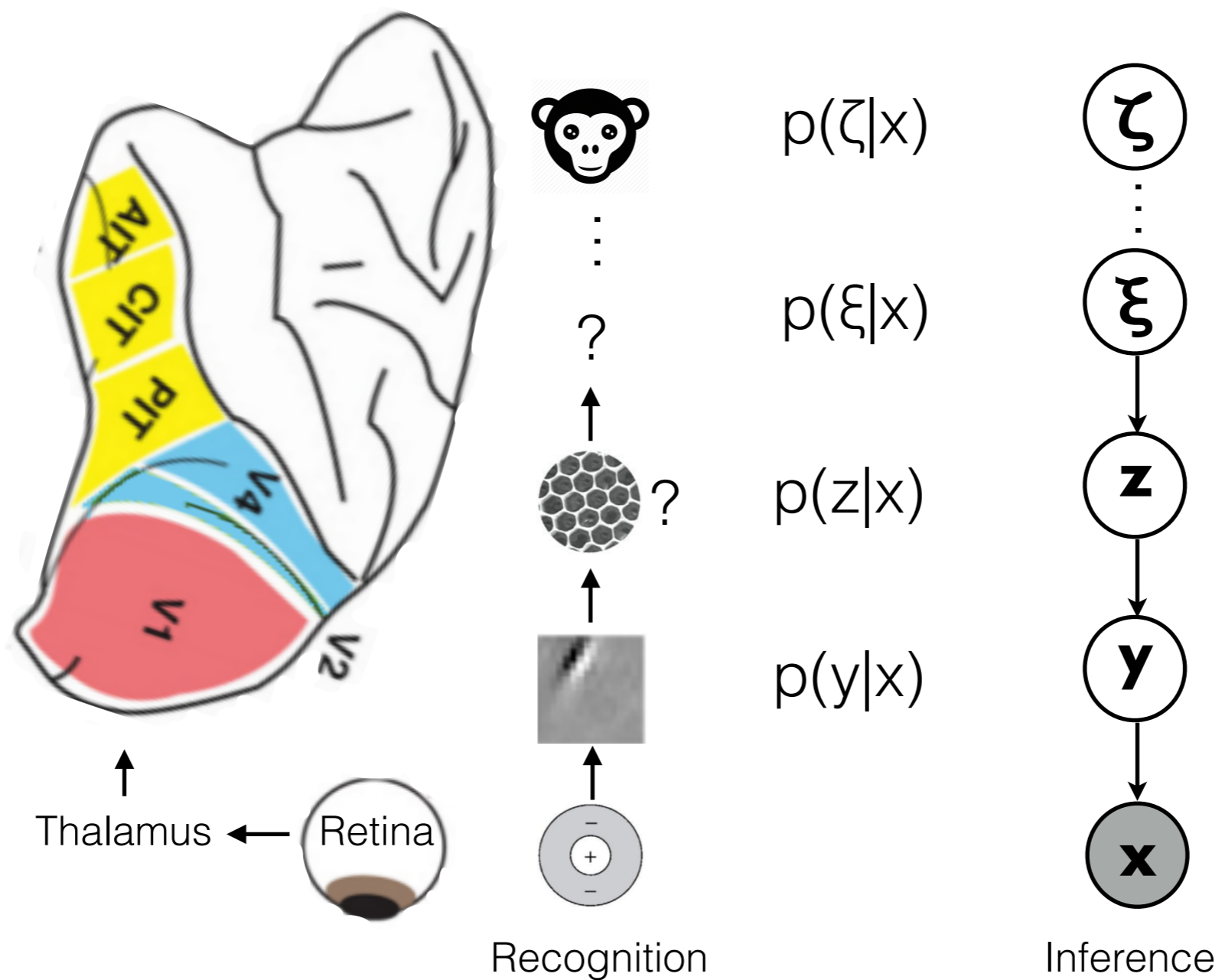
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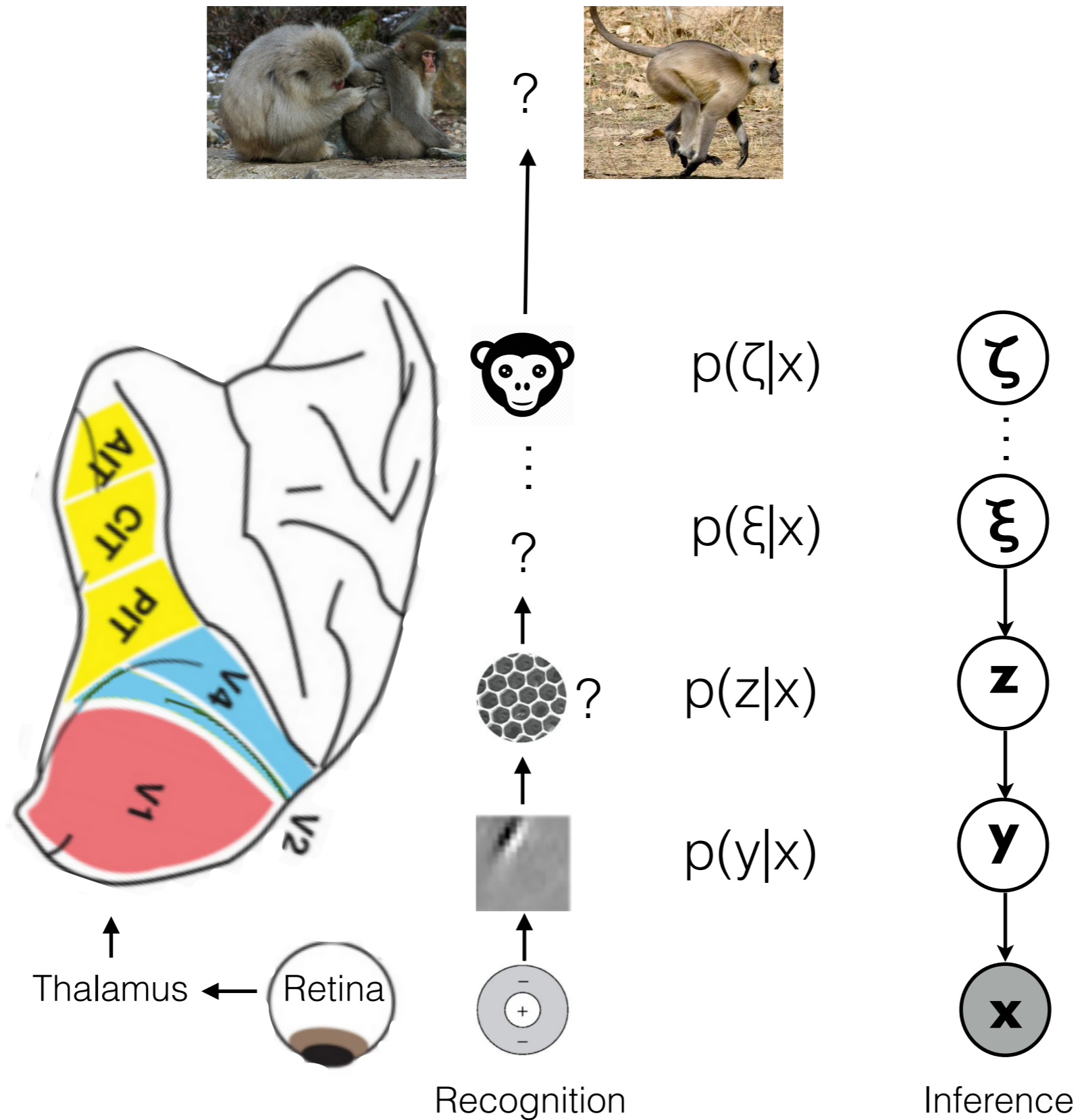
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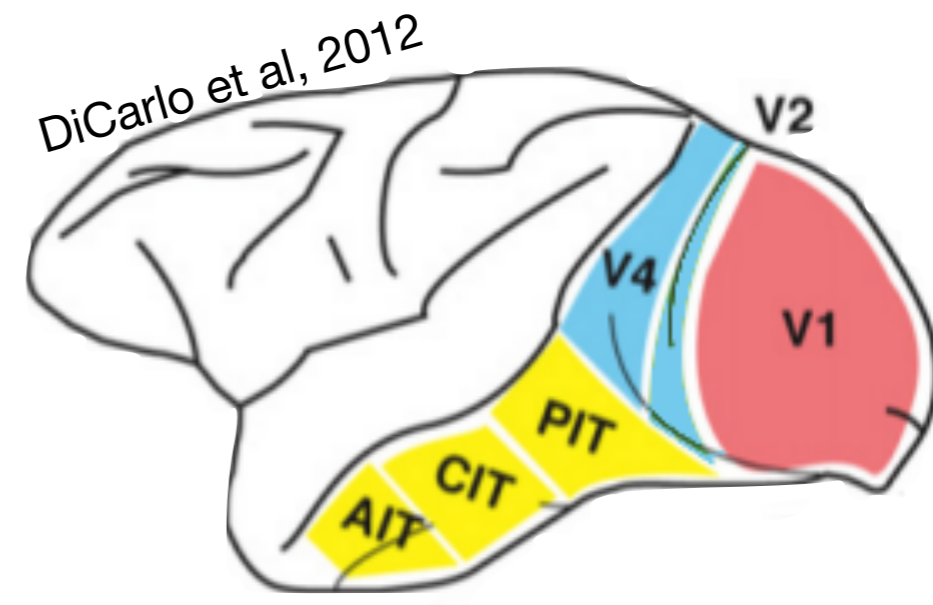
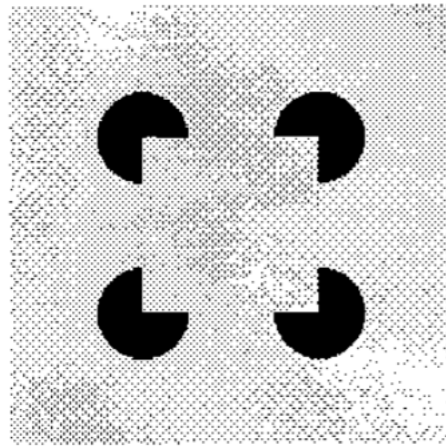
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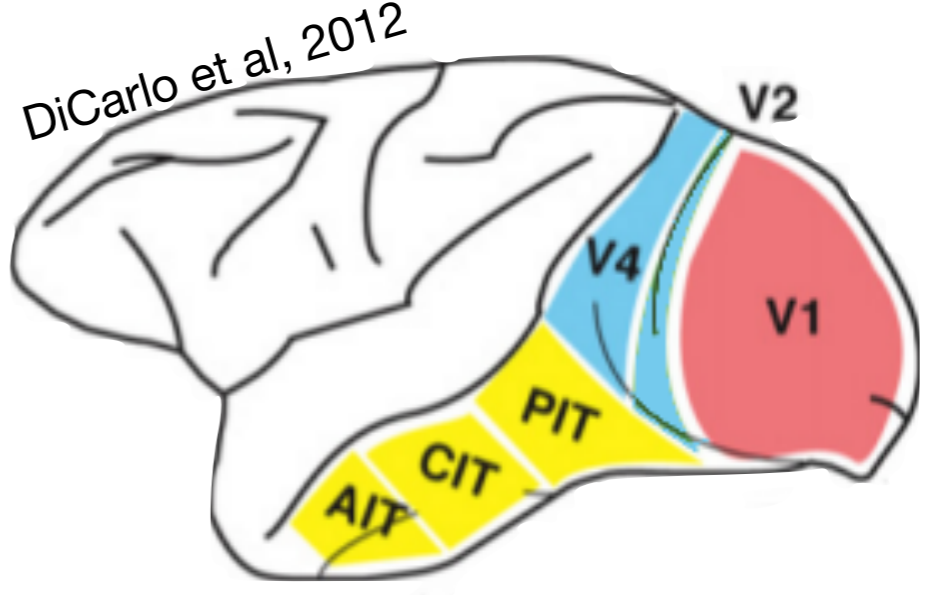
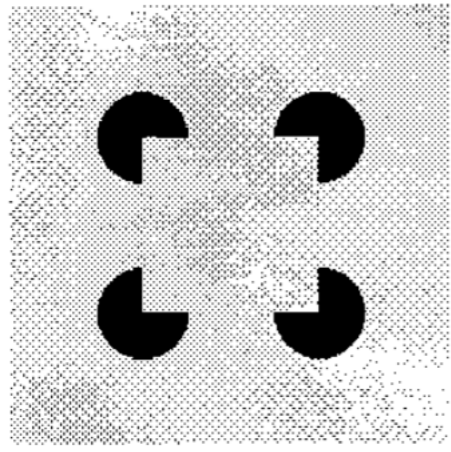
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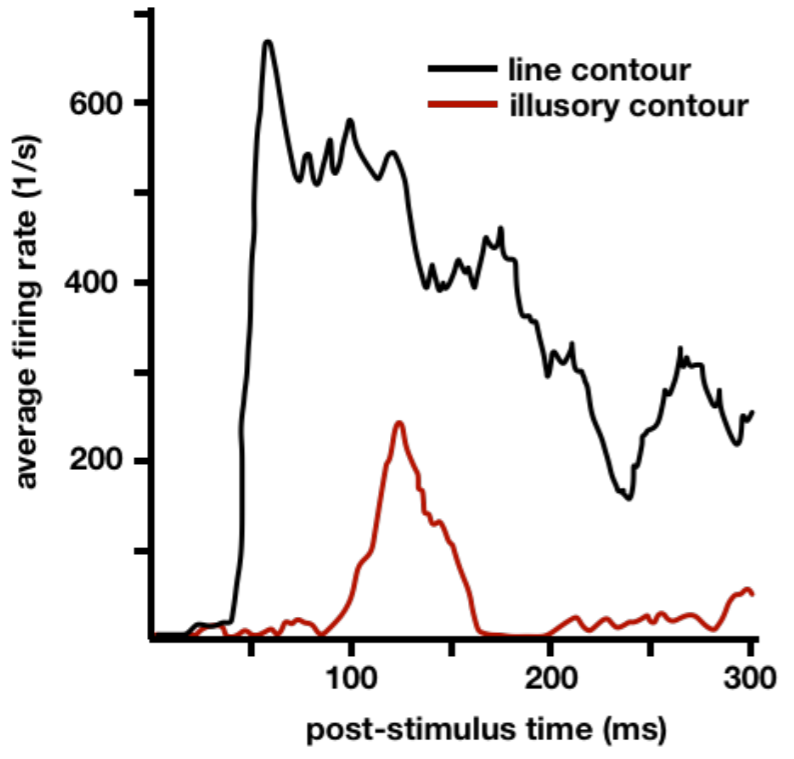
Measured top-down effect in mean responses



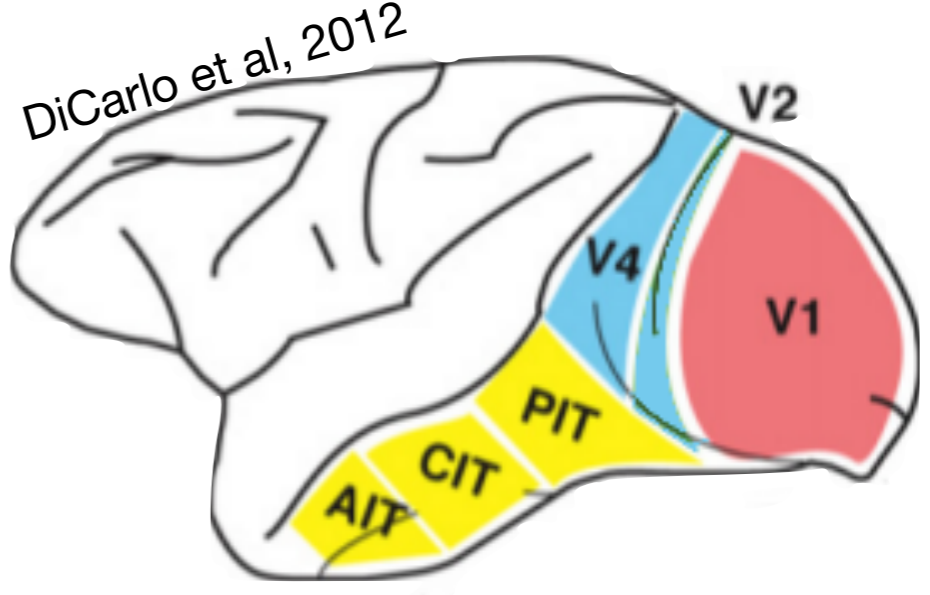
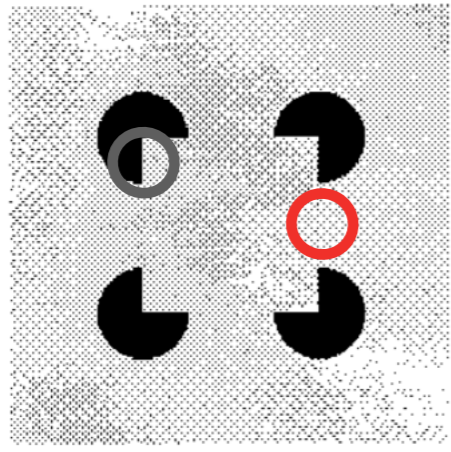
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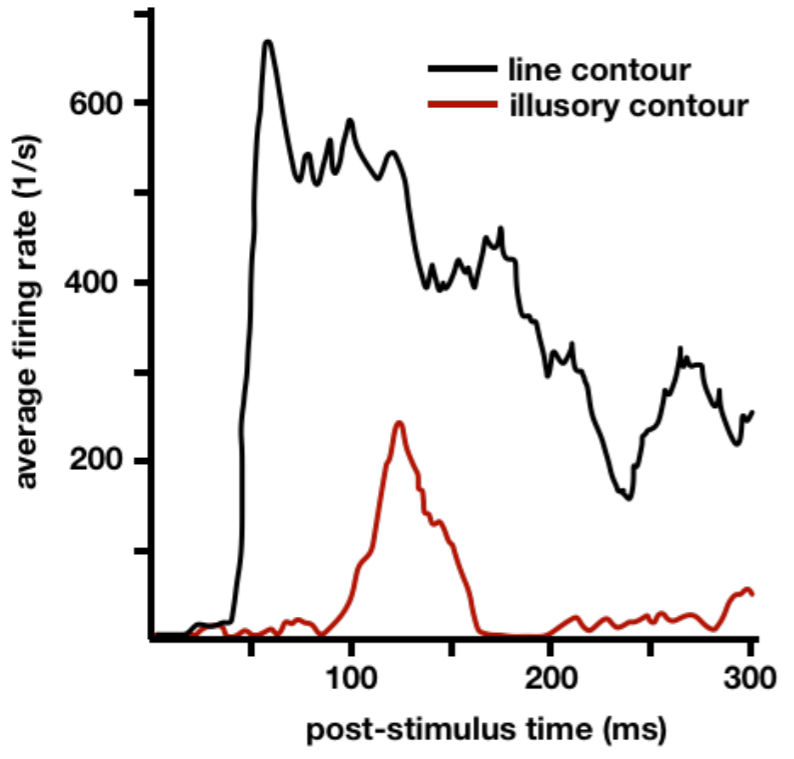
Responses of a V1 simple cell



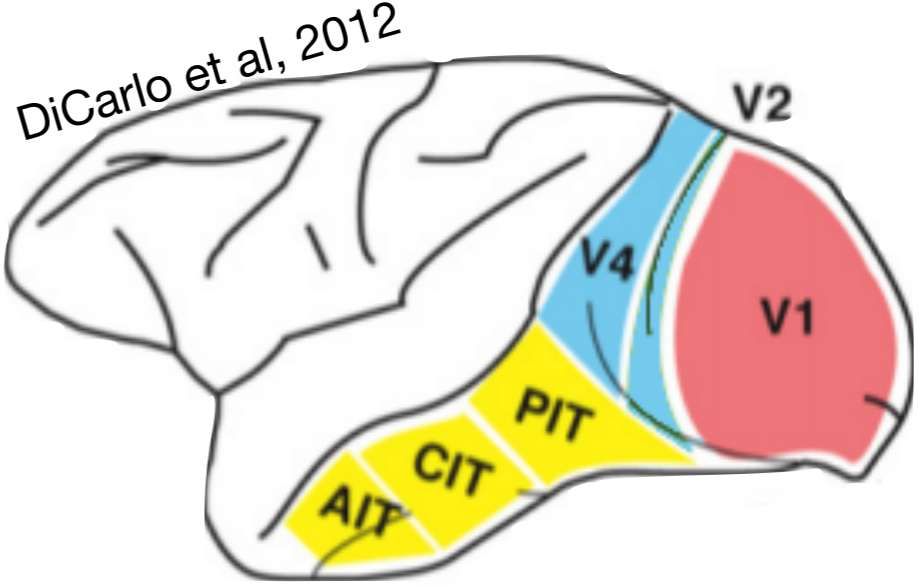
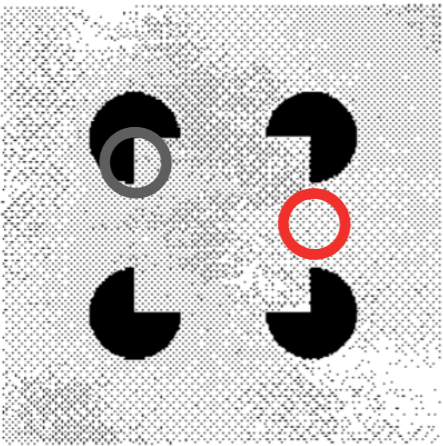
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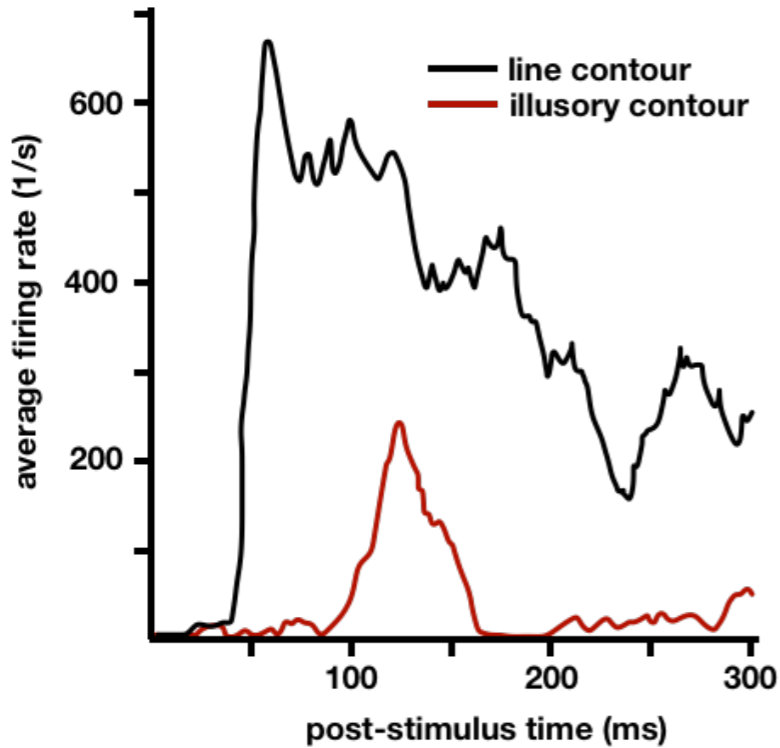
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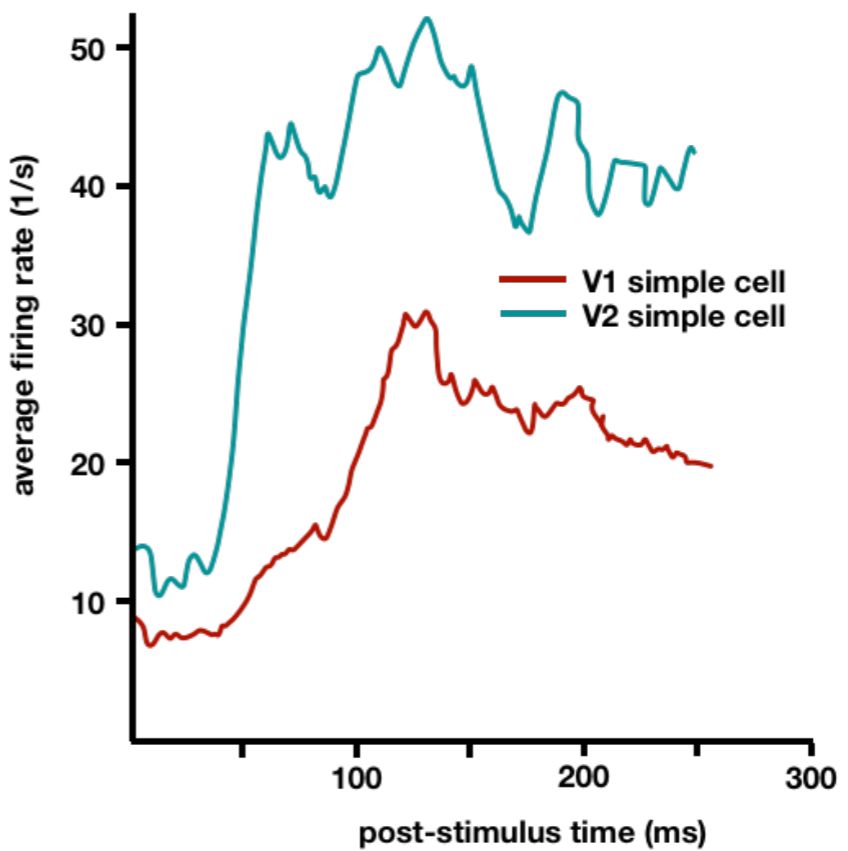
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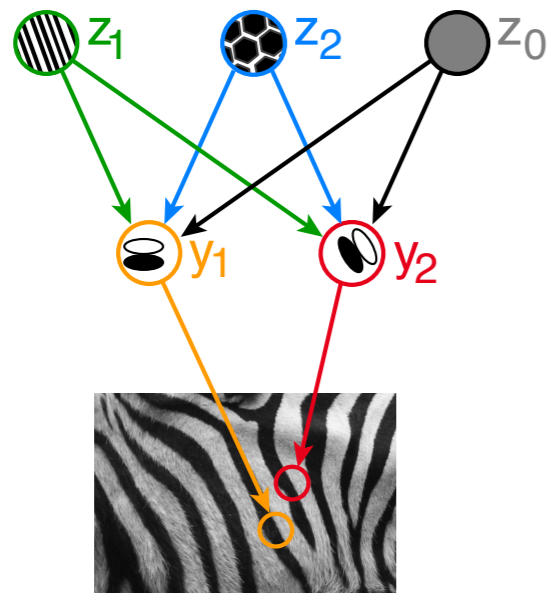
Responses of a V1 simple cell



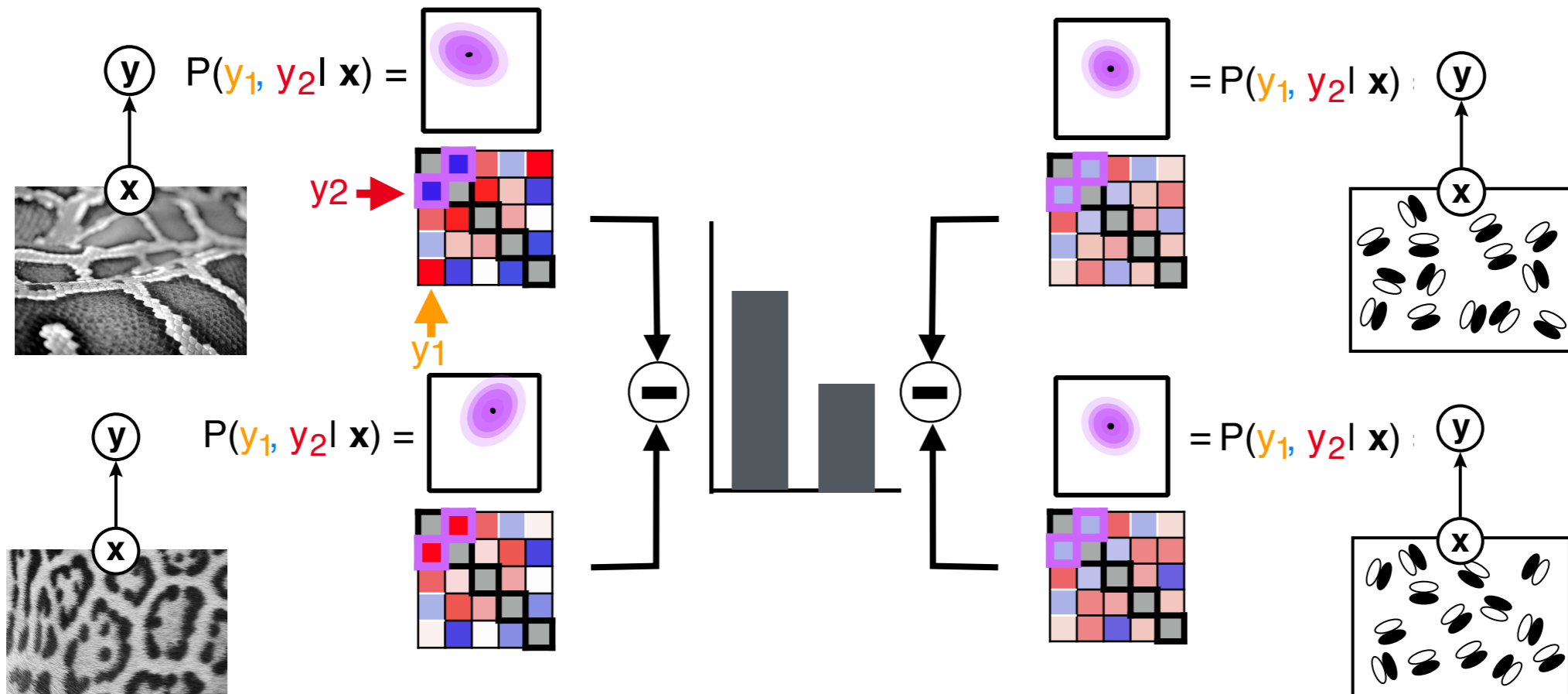
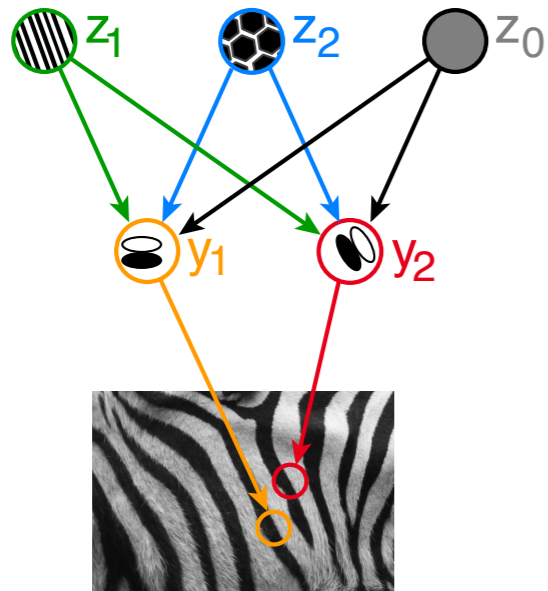
Responses to illusory contours



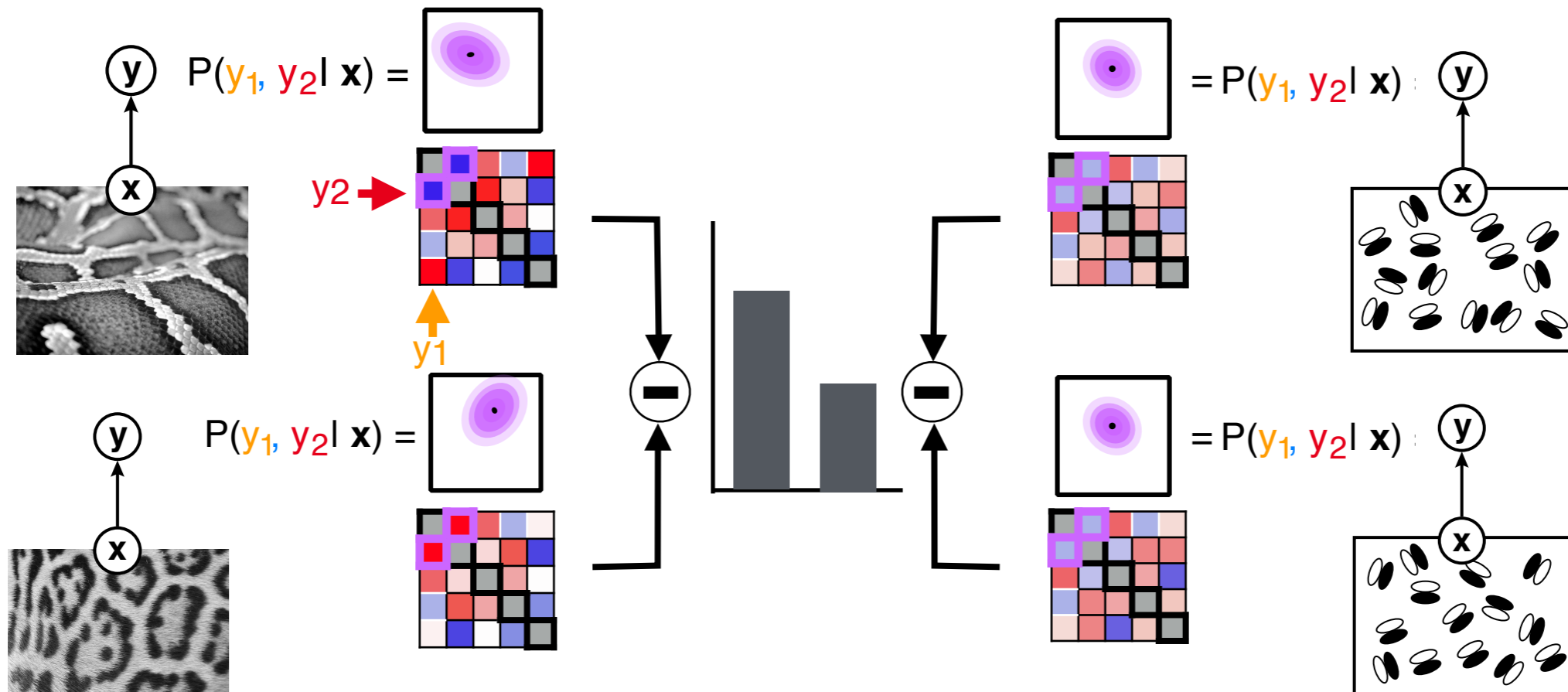
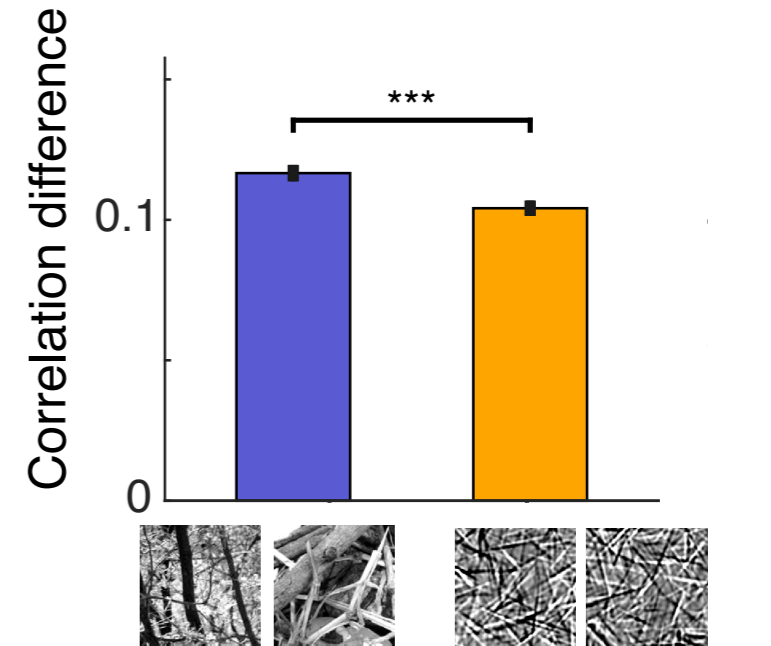
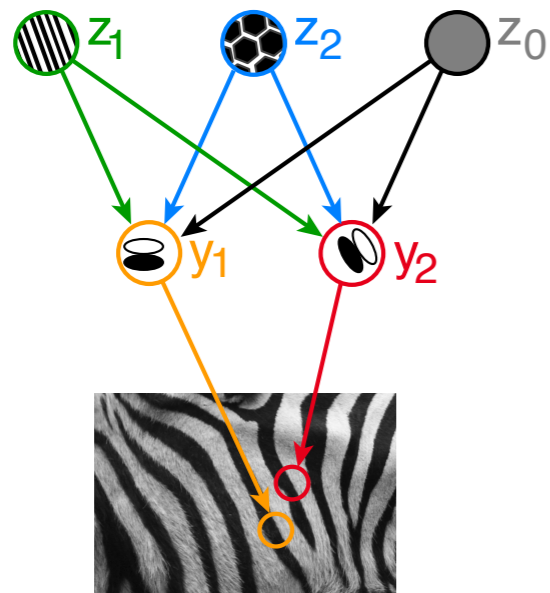
Predictions of context-dependent models



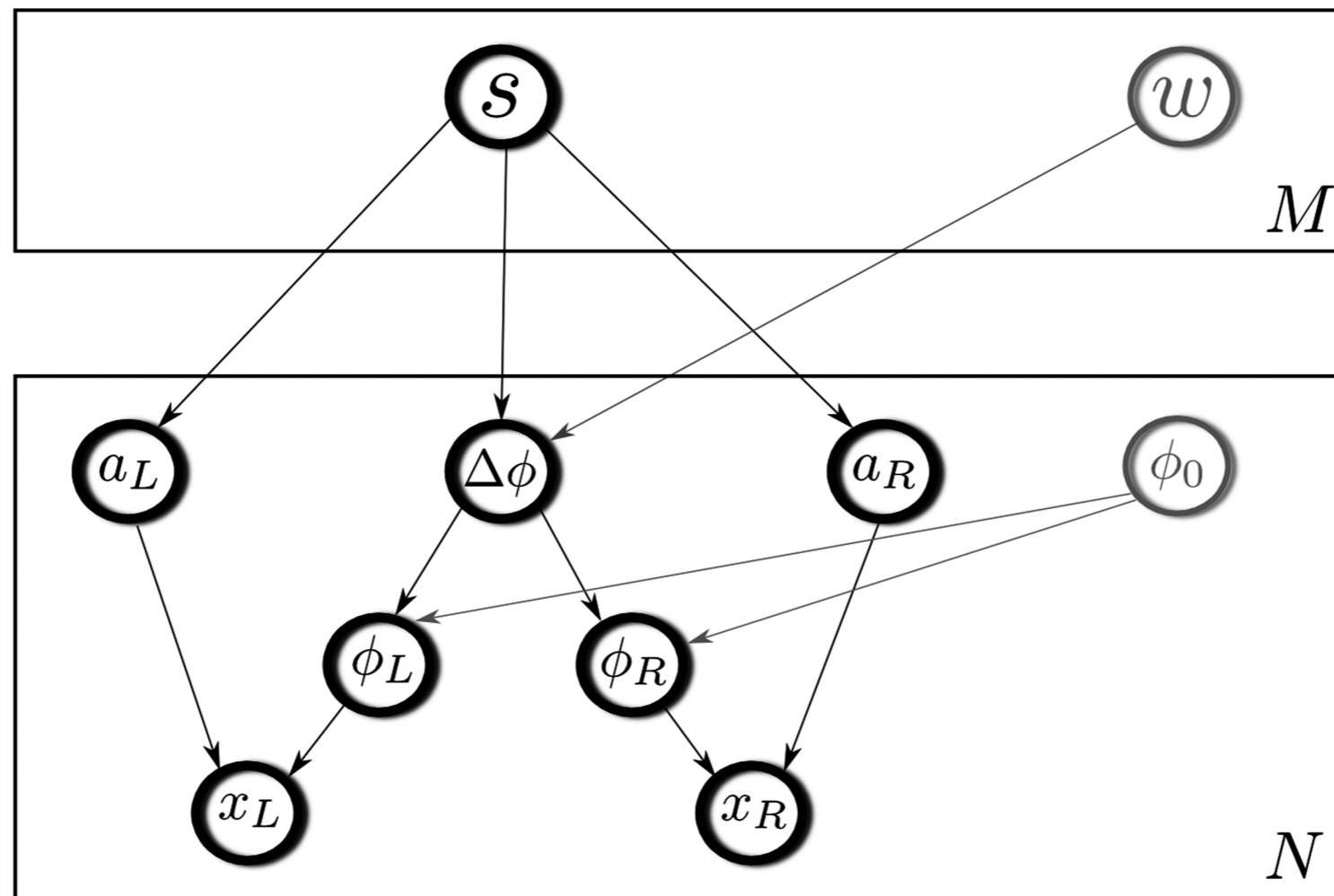
Predictions of context-dependent models



Predictions of context-dependent models



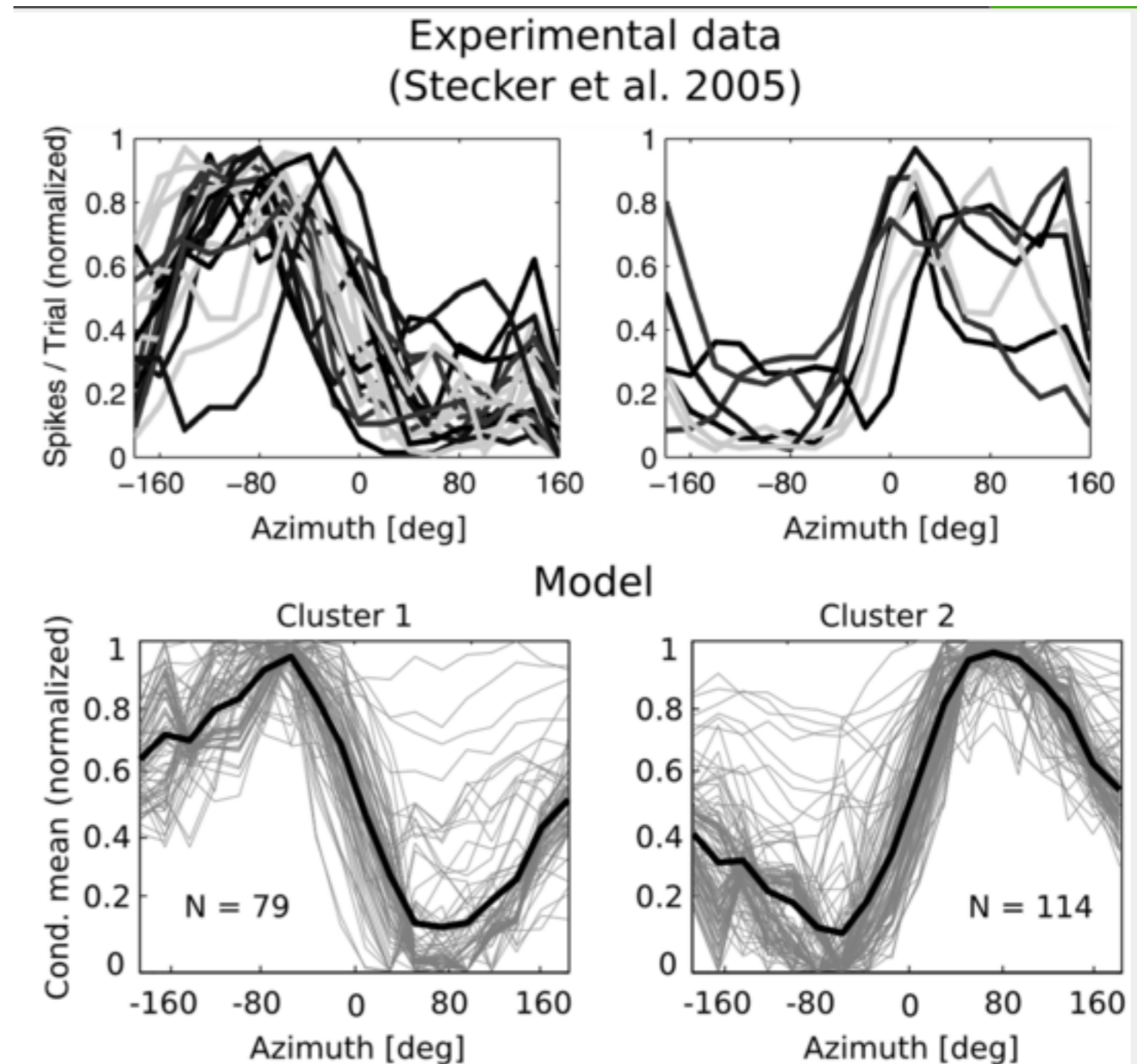
A generative model for audition



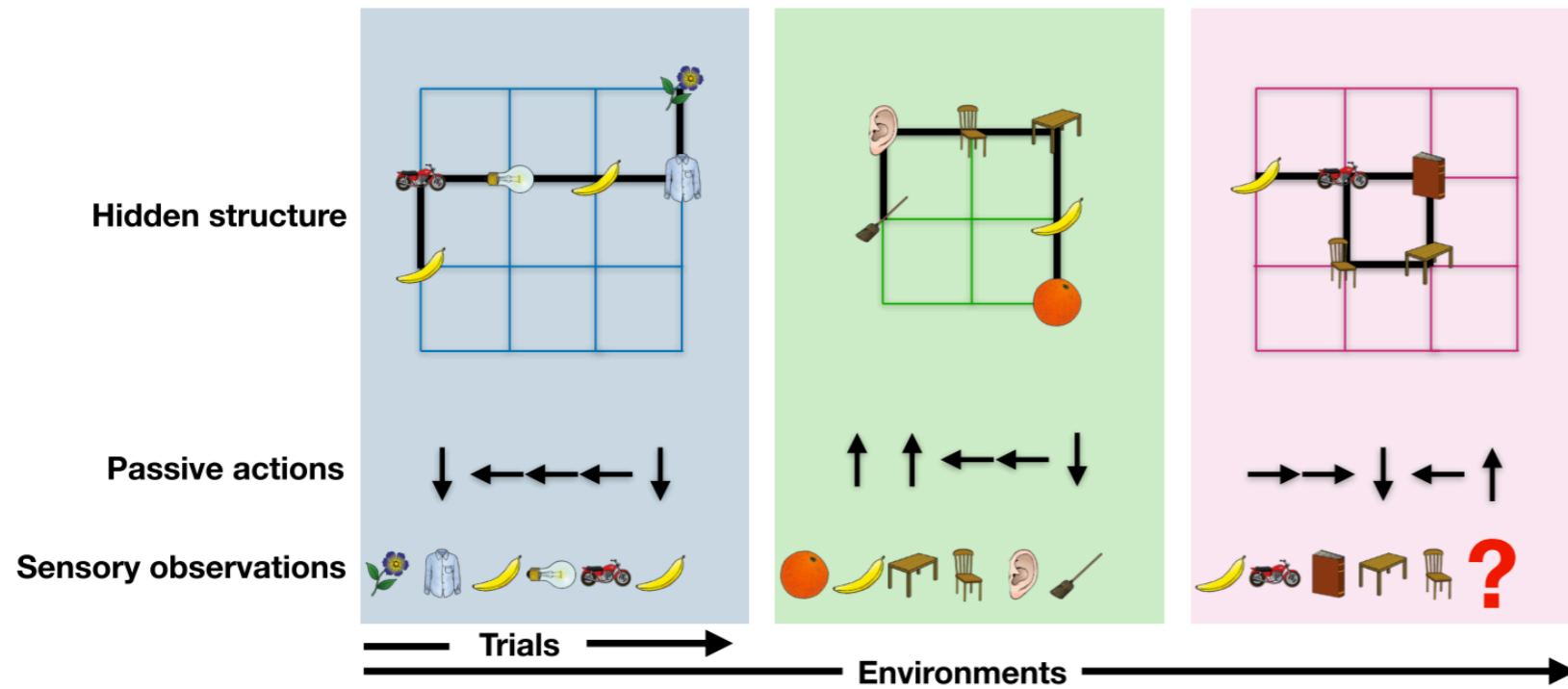
The lowest layer represents sound epochs perceived by the left and the right ear x_L and x_R . They are decomposed by a sparse coding algorithm into phase and amplitude vectors ϕ_L , ϕ_R and a_L , a_R . Phases are further subtracted from each other in order to obtain an intramural phase difference (IPD) vector $\Delta\phi$. The second layer encodes jointly monaural amplitudes and IPDs. Auxiliary variables (phase offset and the scaling factor w) are depicted in gray.

Predictions of the auditory model

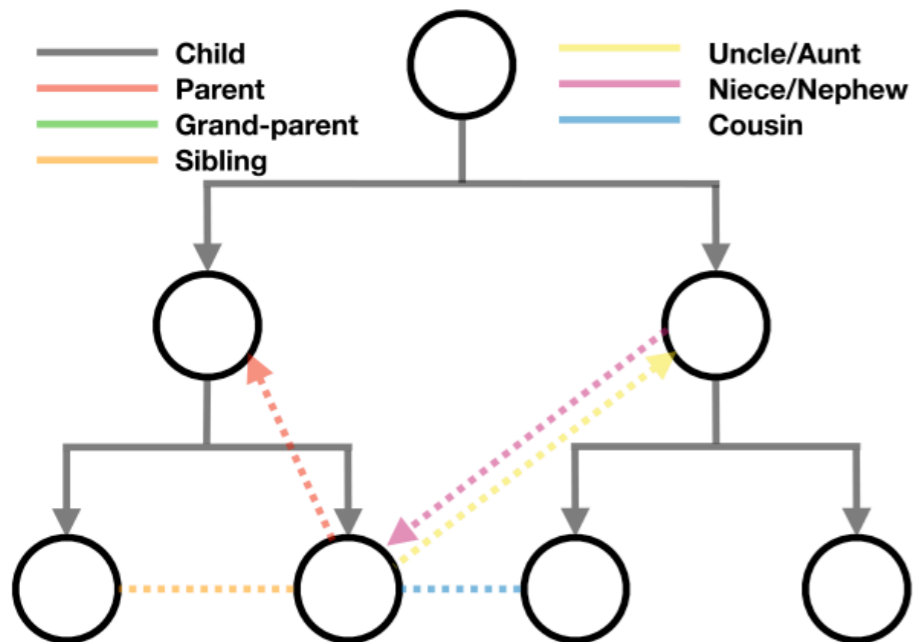
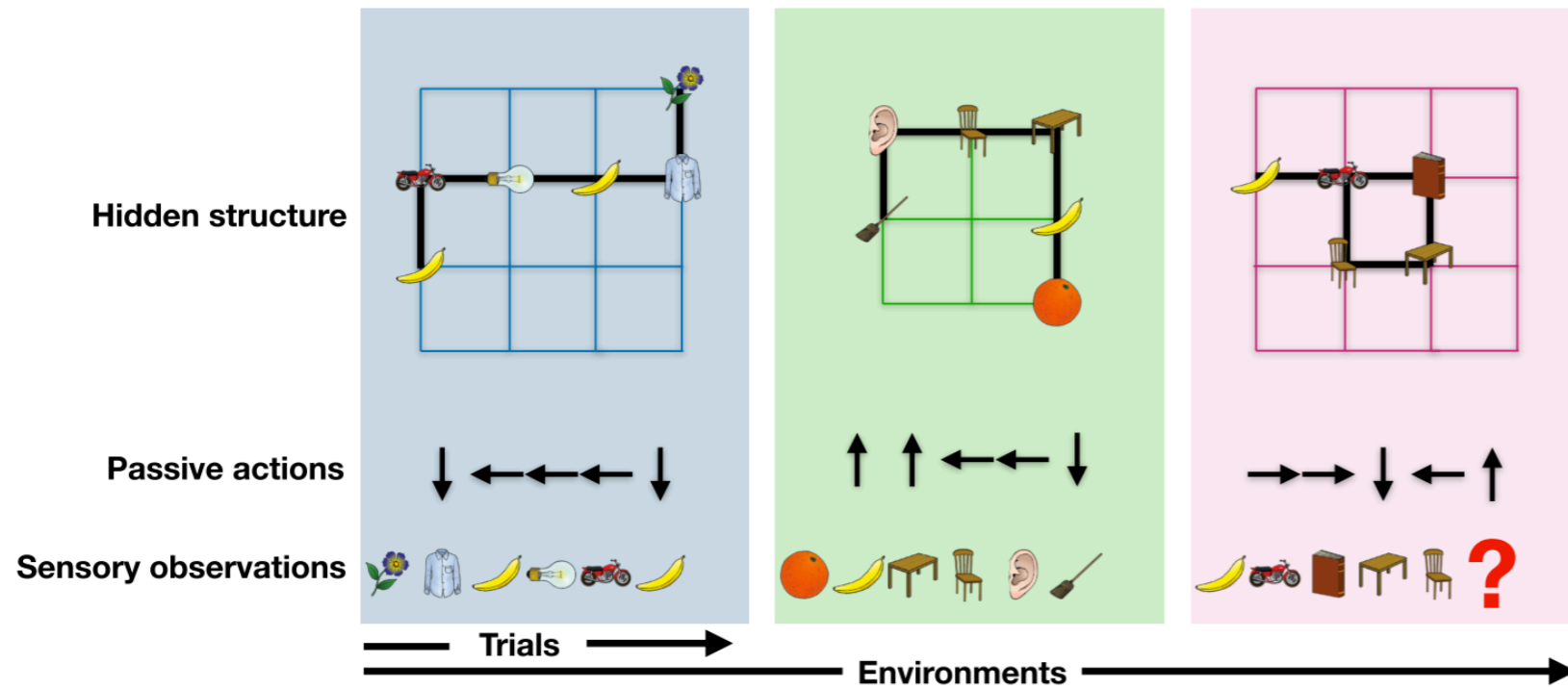
- Experimentally measured responses to sounds originating from different directions measured in the A1 area of the cat in two types of neurons.
- Model predictions sorted into two typical clusters of variables. Thin gray lines are values of single variables, while thick black lines depict cluster averages



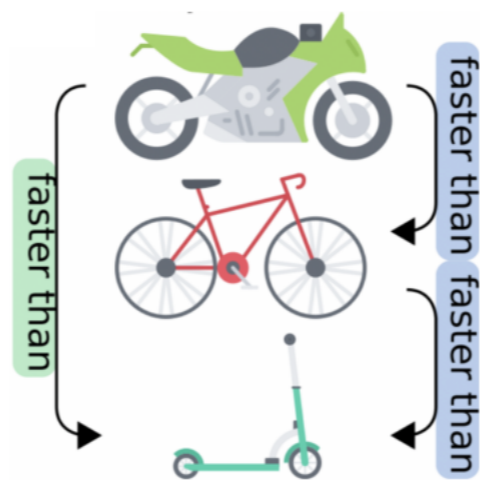
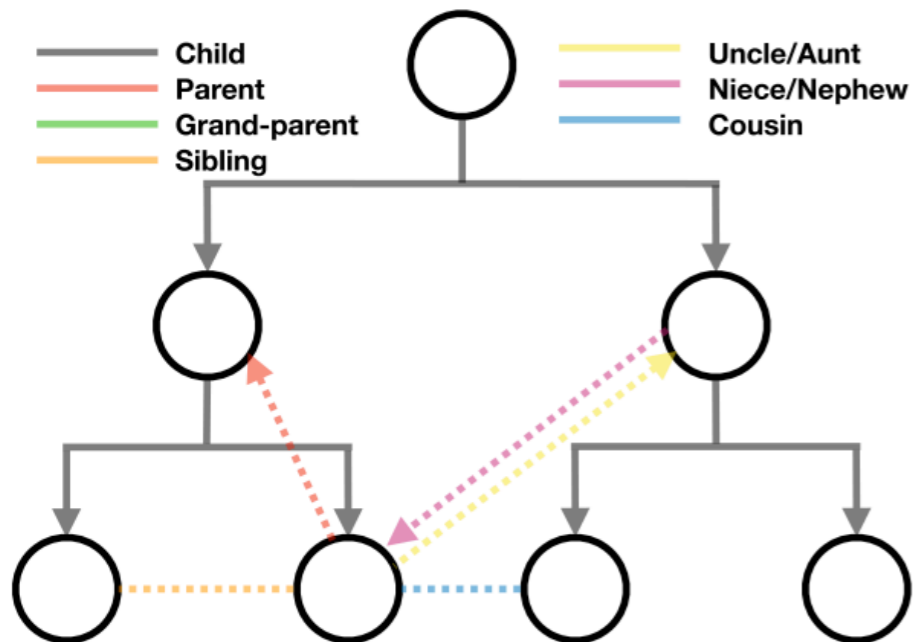
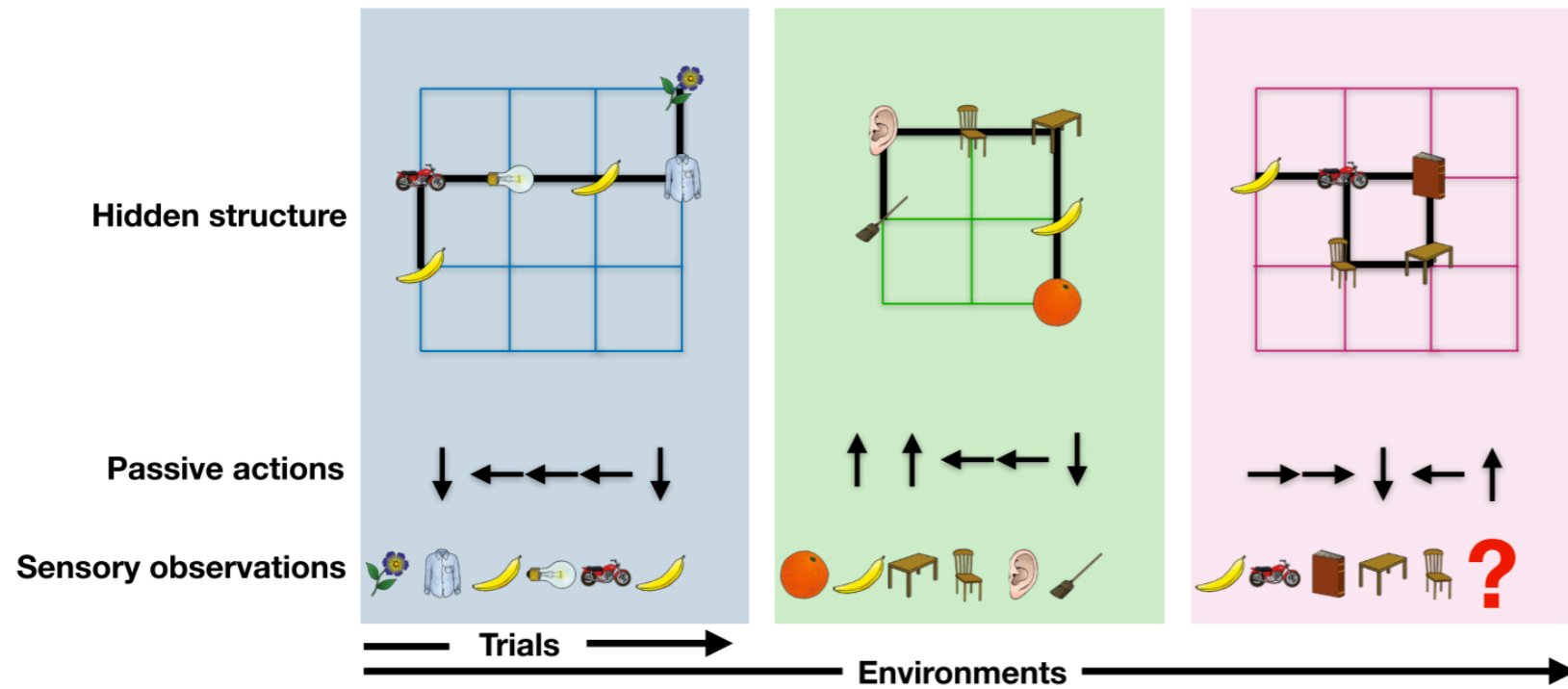
Factorising relational and sensory information



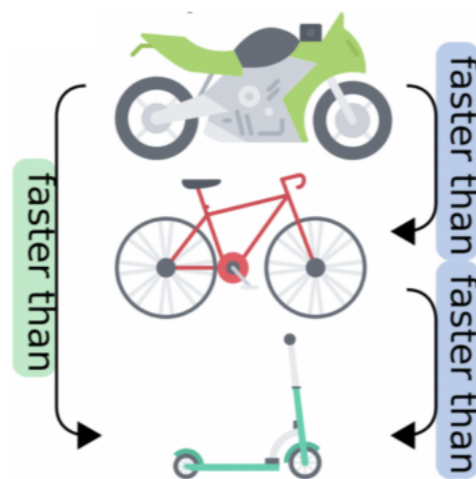
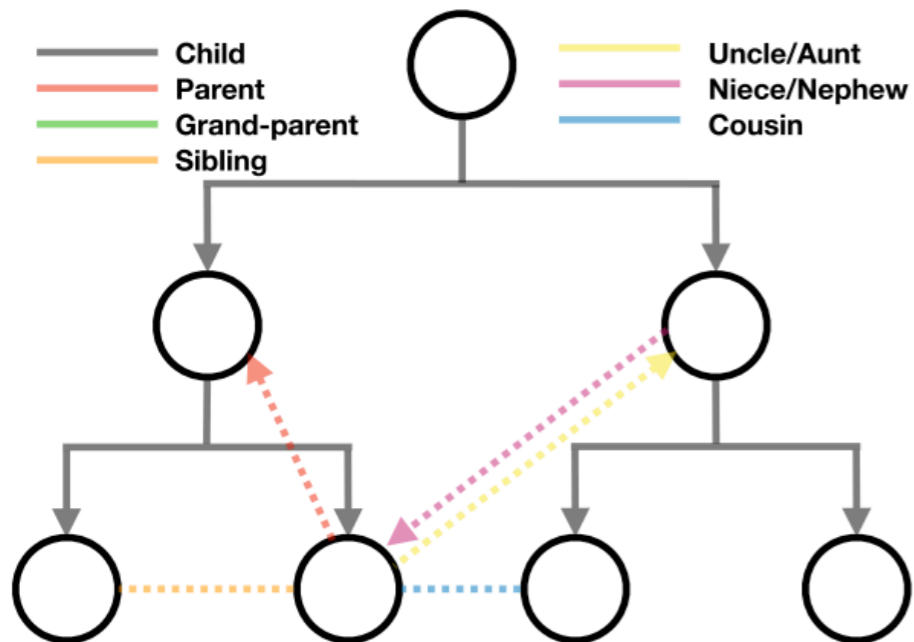
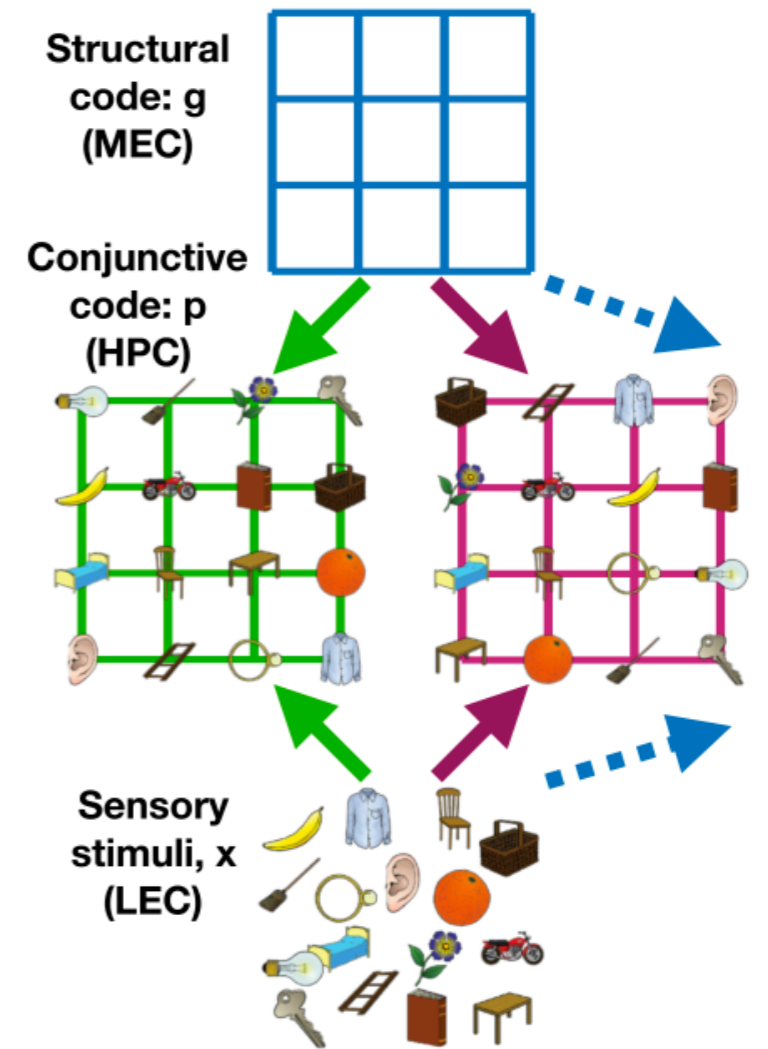
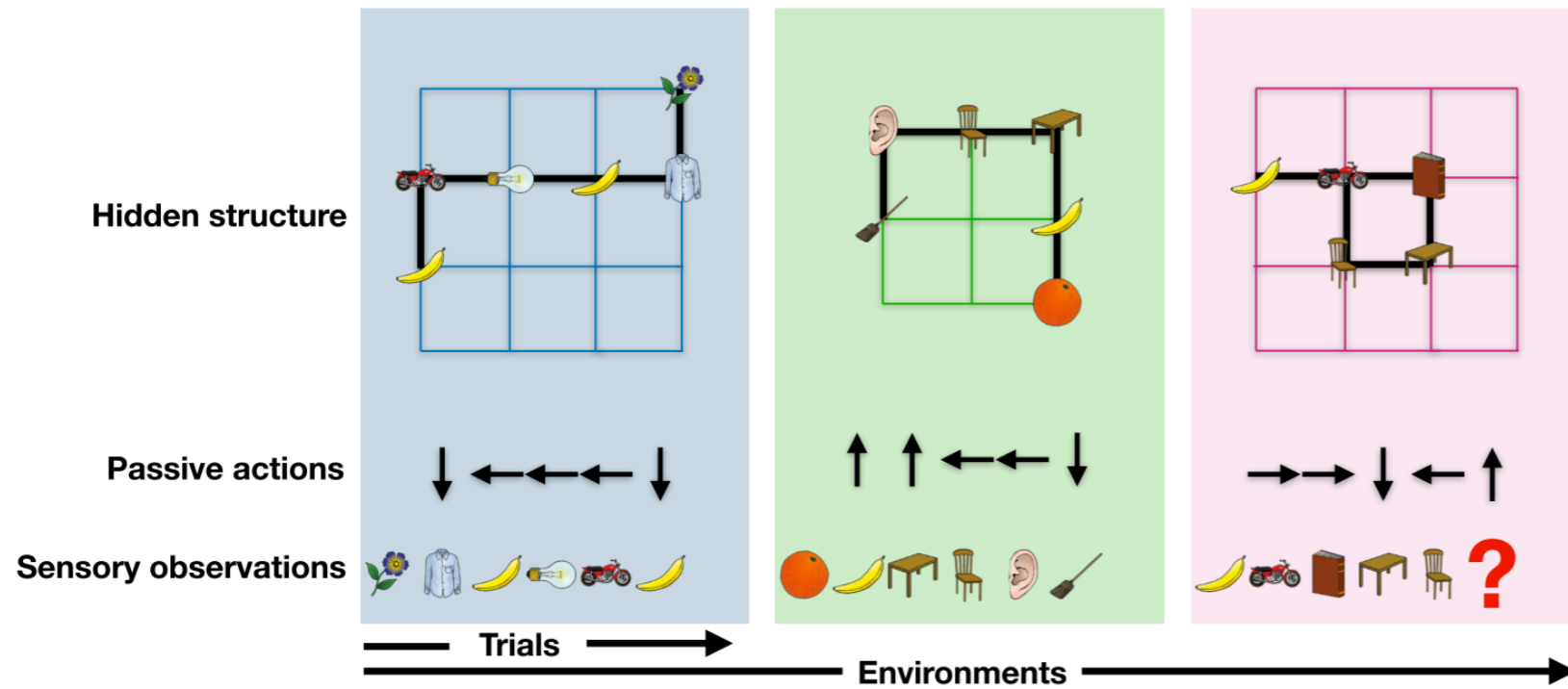
Factorising relational and sensory information



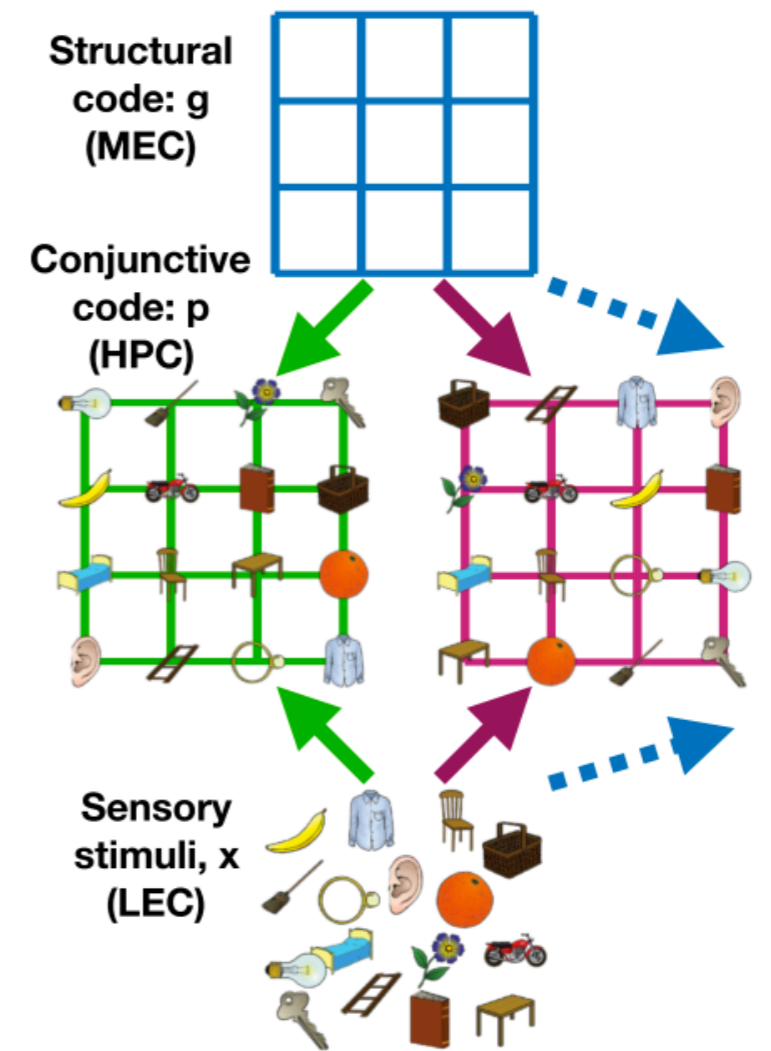
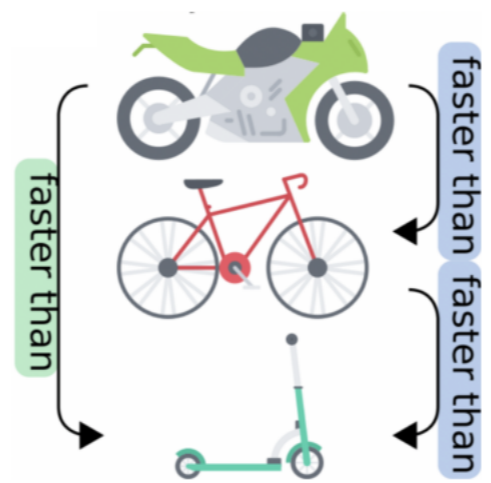
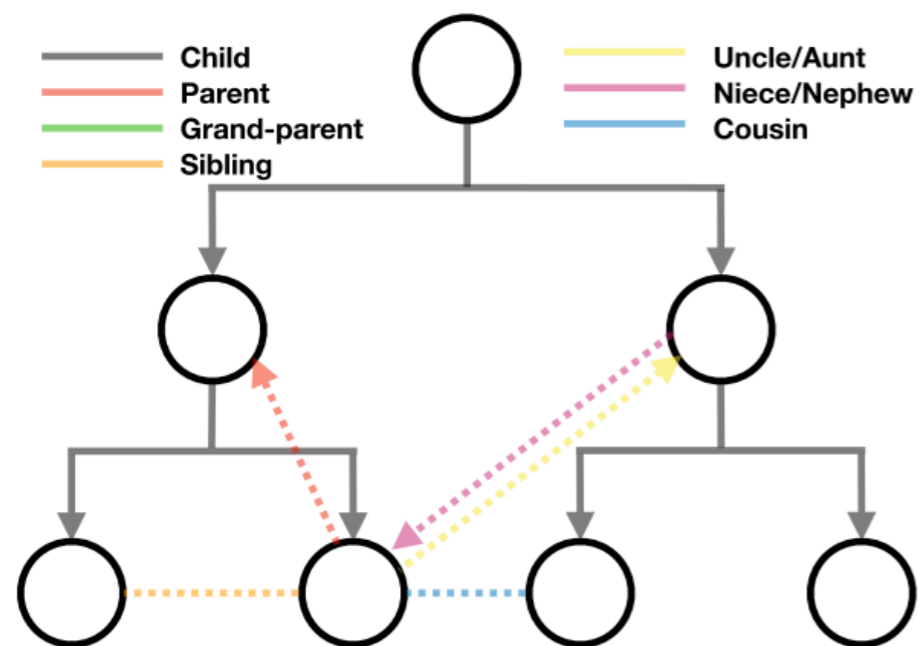
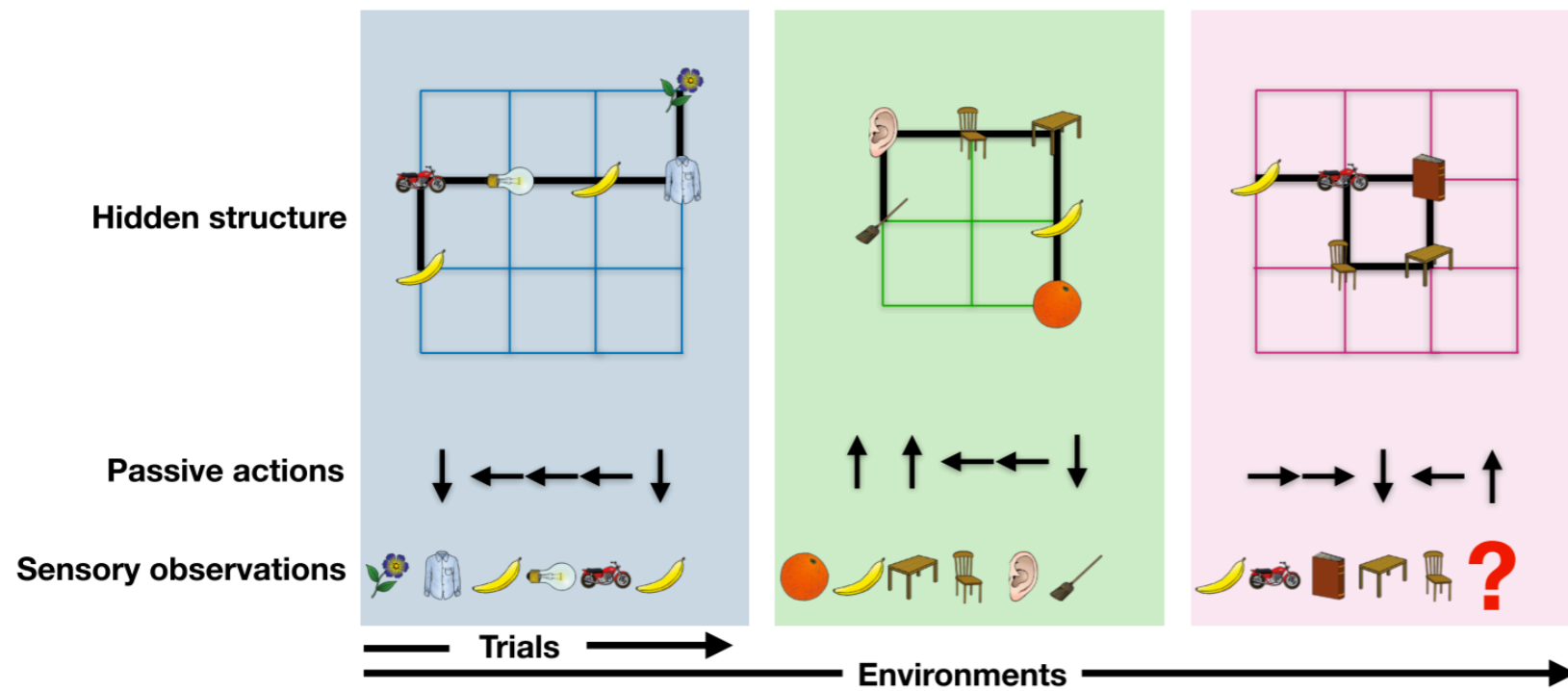
Factorising relational and sensory information



Factorising relational and sensory information

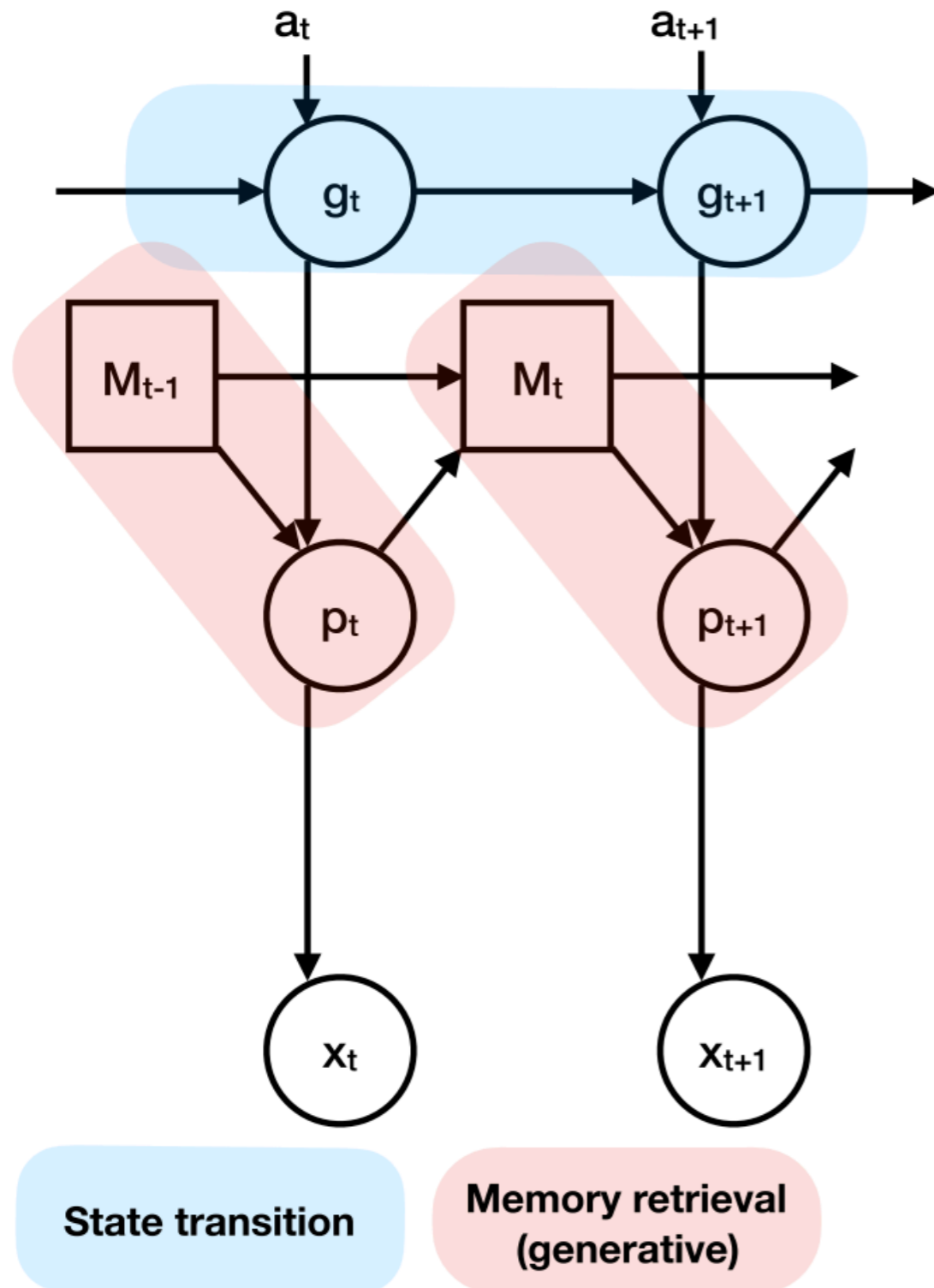


Factorising relational and sensory information



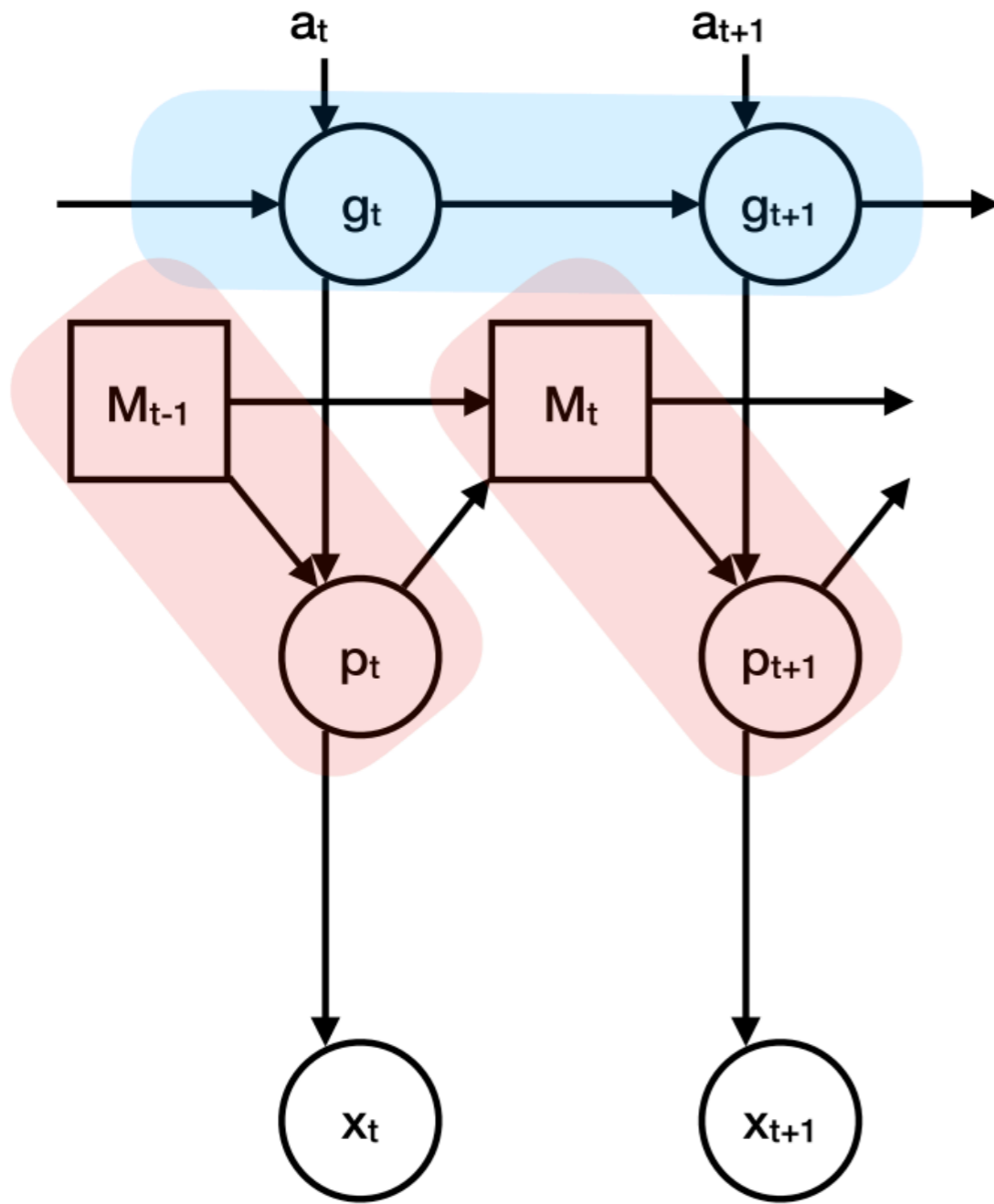
The Tolman-Eichenbaum machine

Generative model



The Tolman-Eichenbaum machine

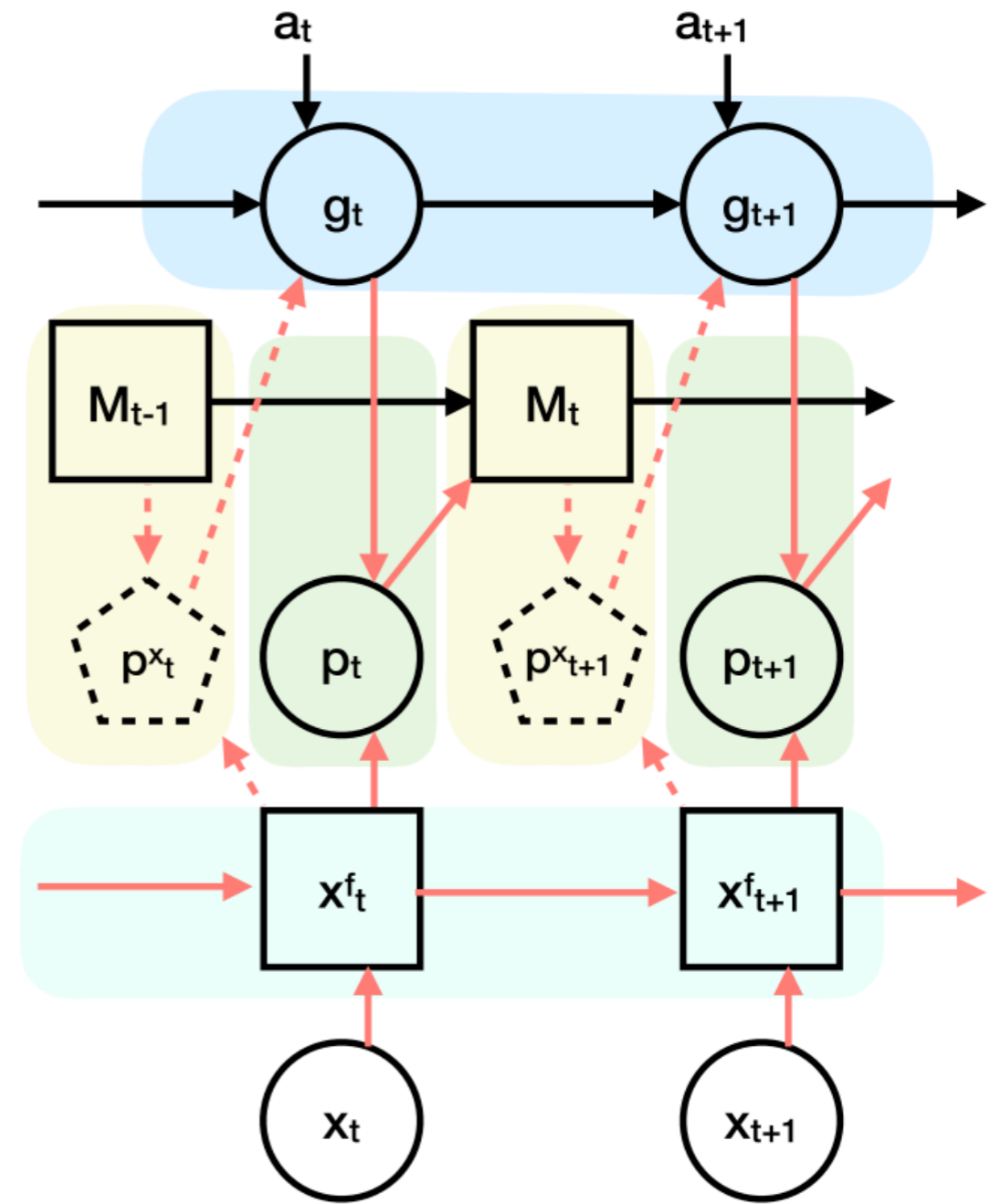
Generative model



State transition

Memory retrieval
(generative)

Inference model

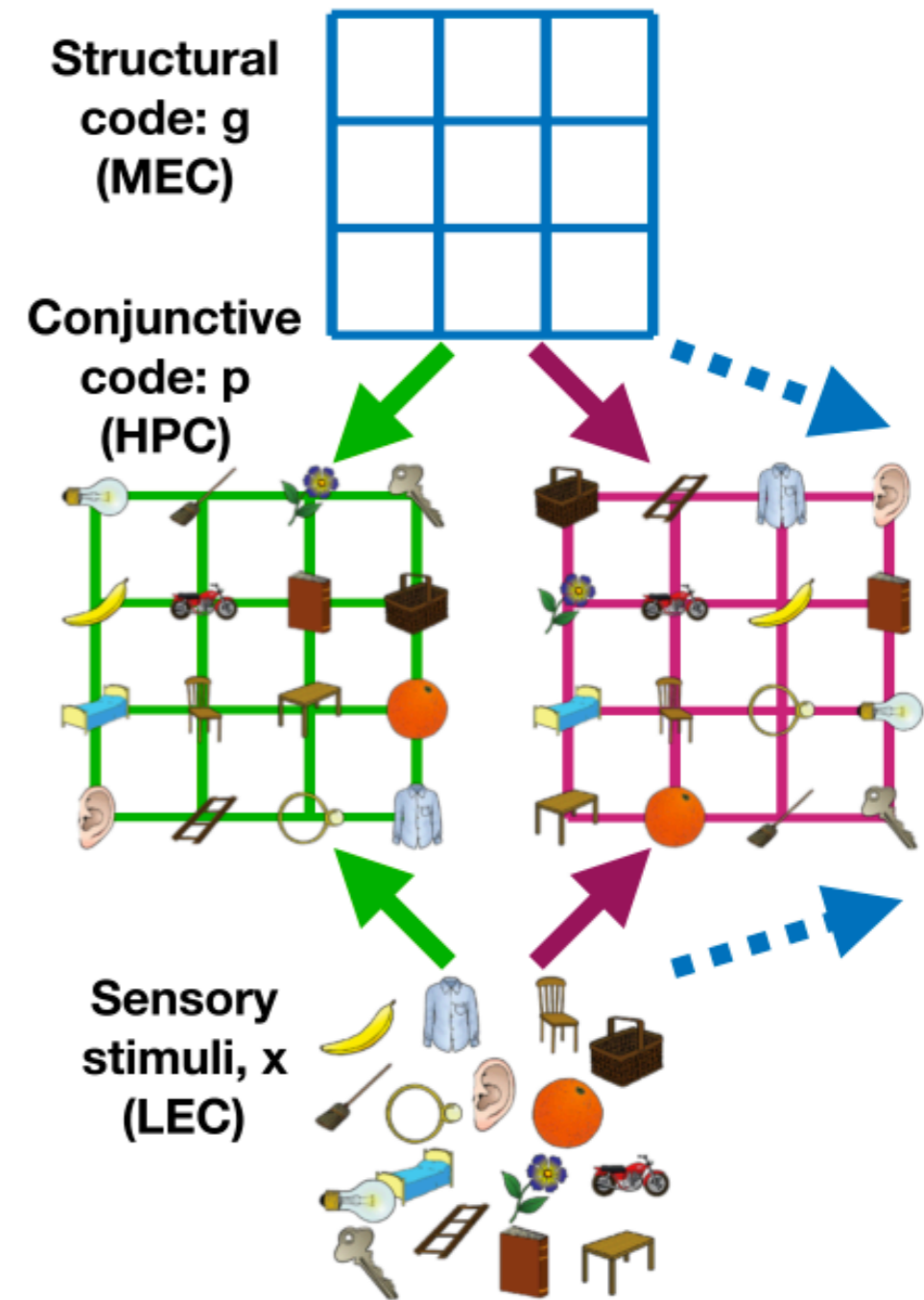
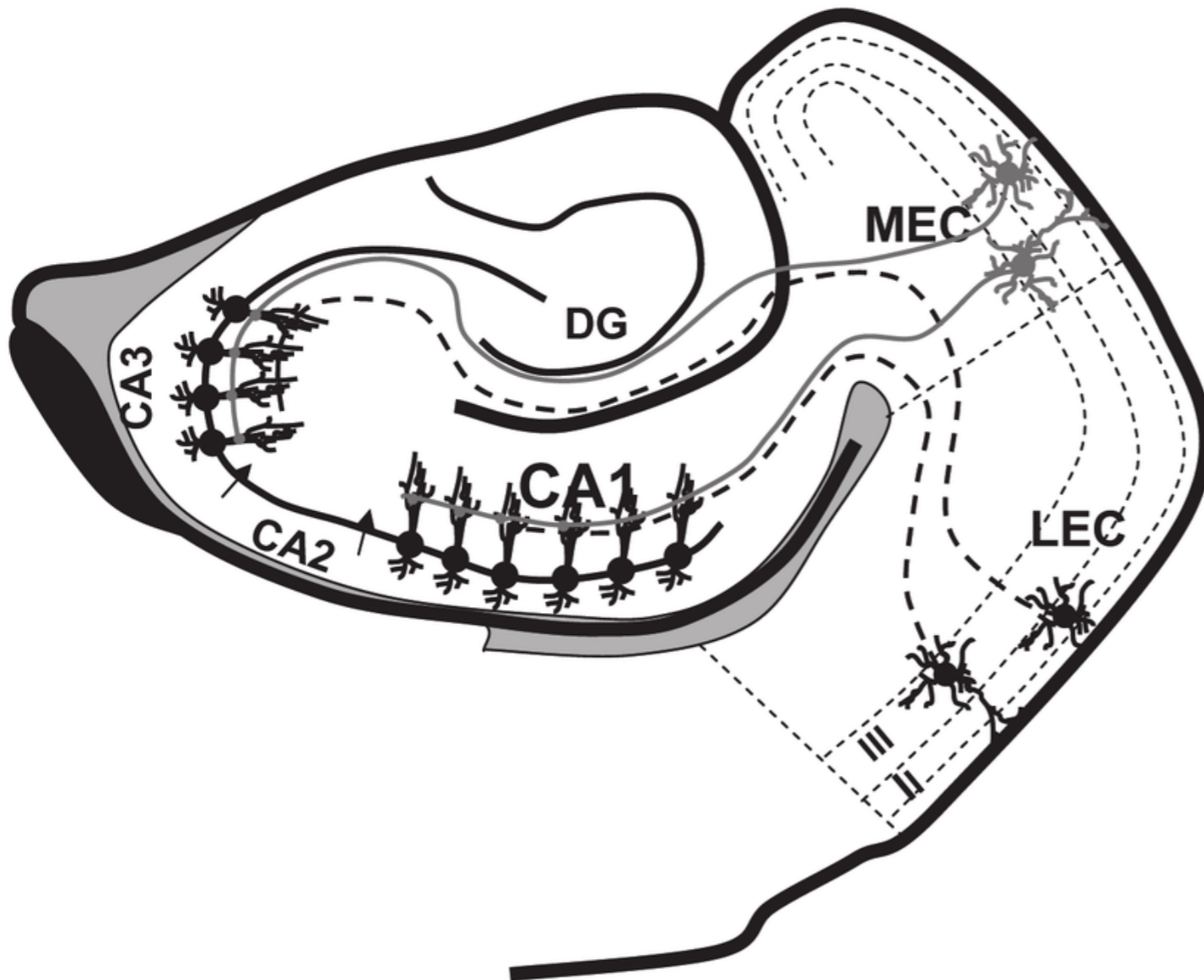


Temporally filter
sensory

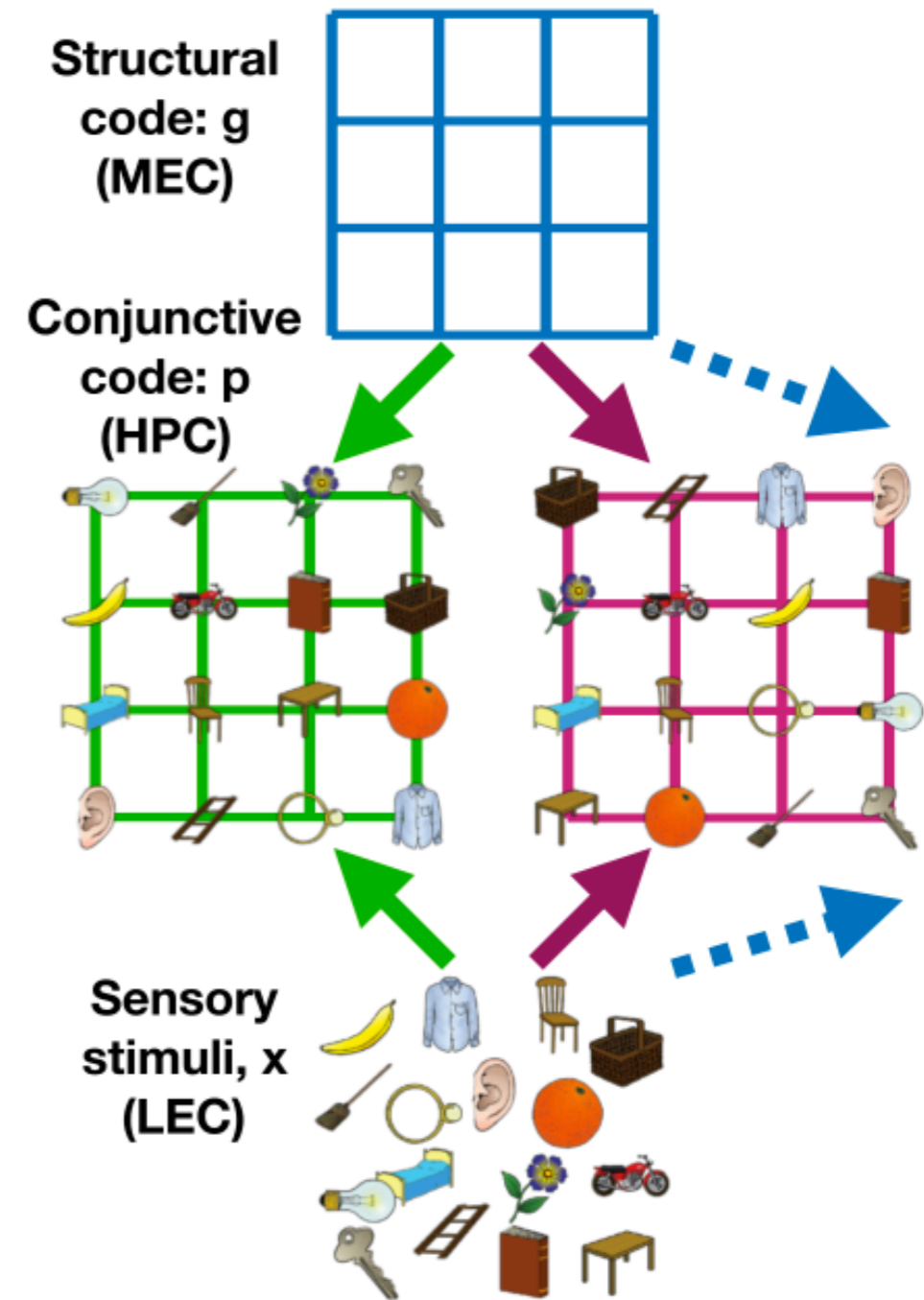
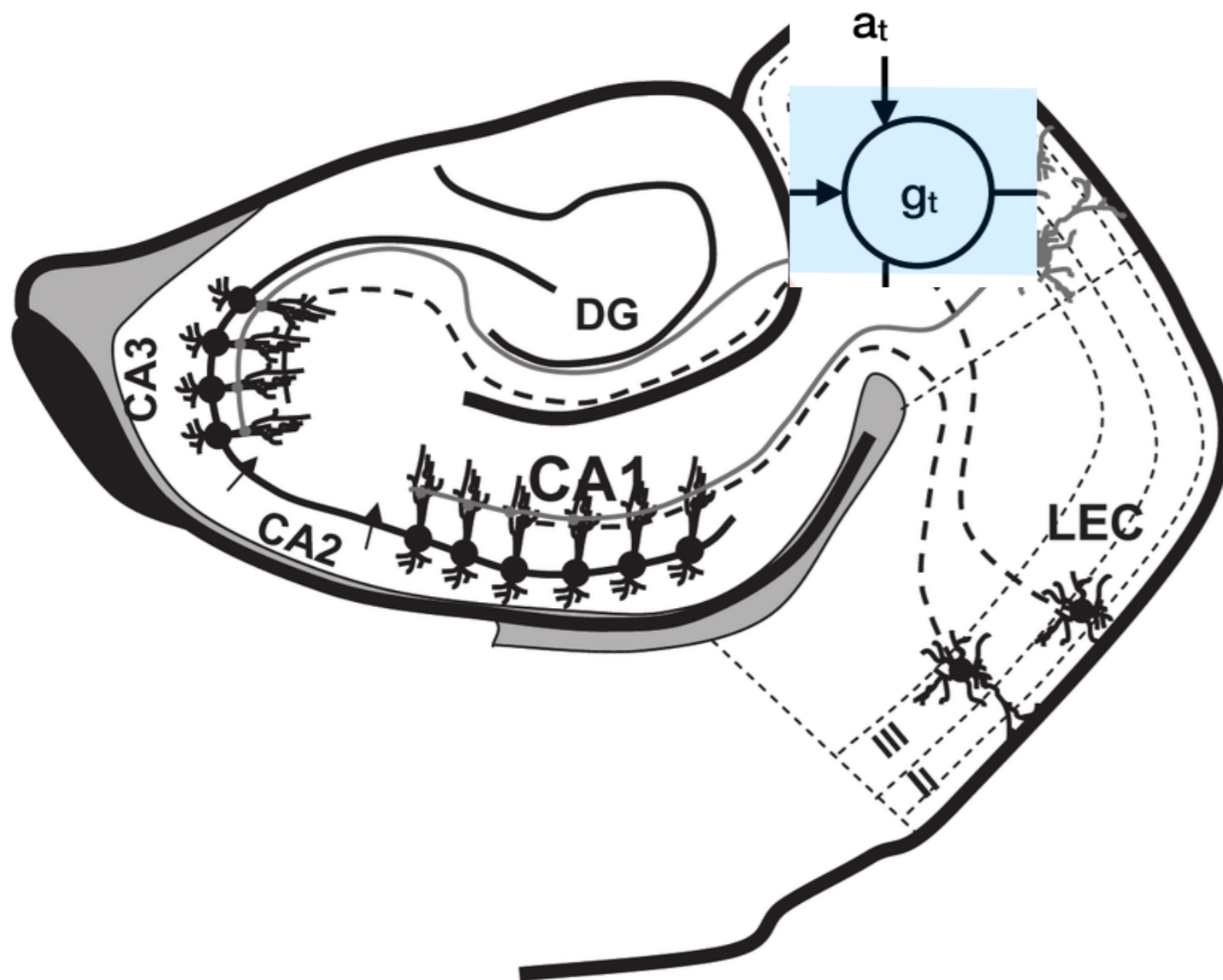
Memory retrieval
(inference)

Conjunctive memory
formation

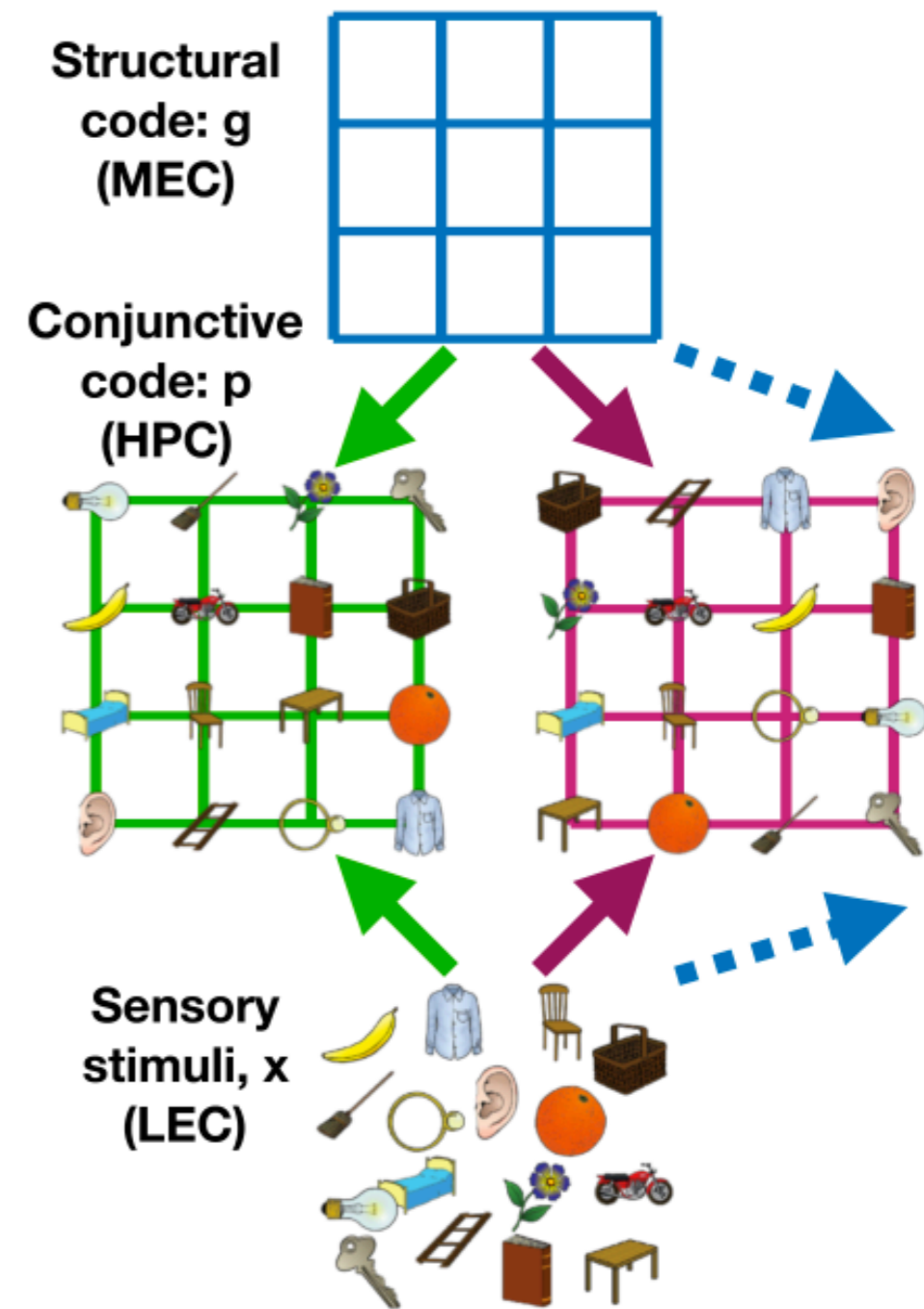
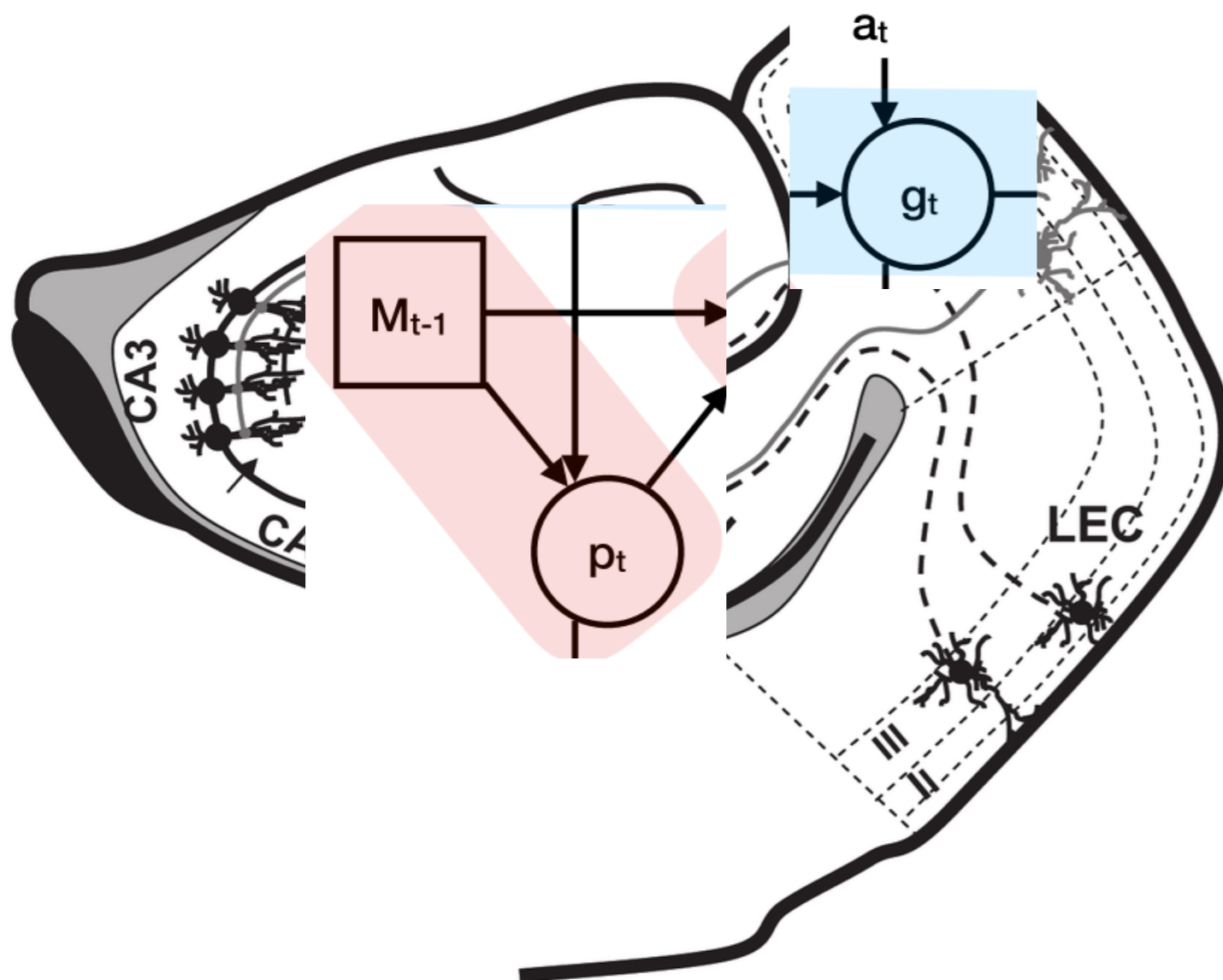
The TEM and the Brain



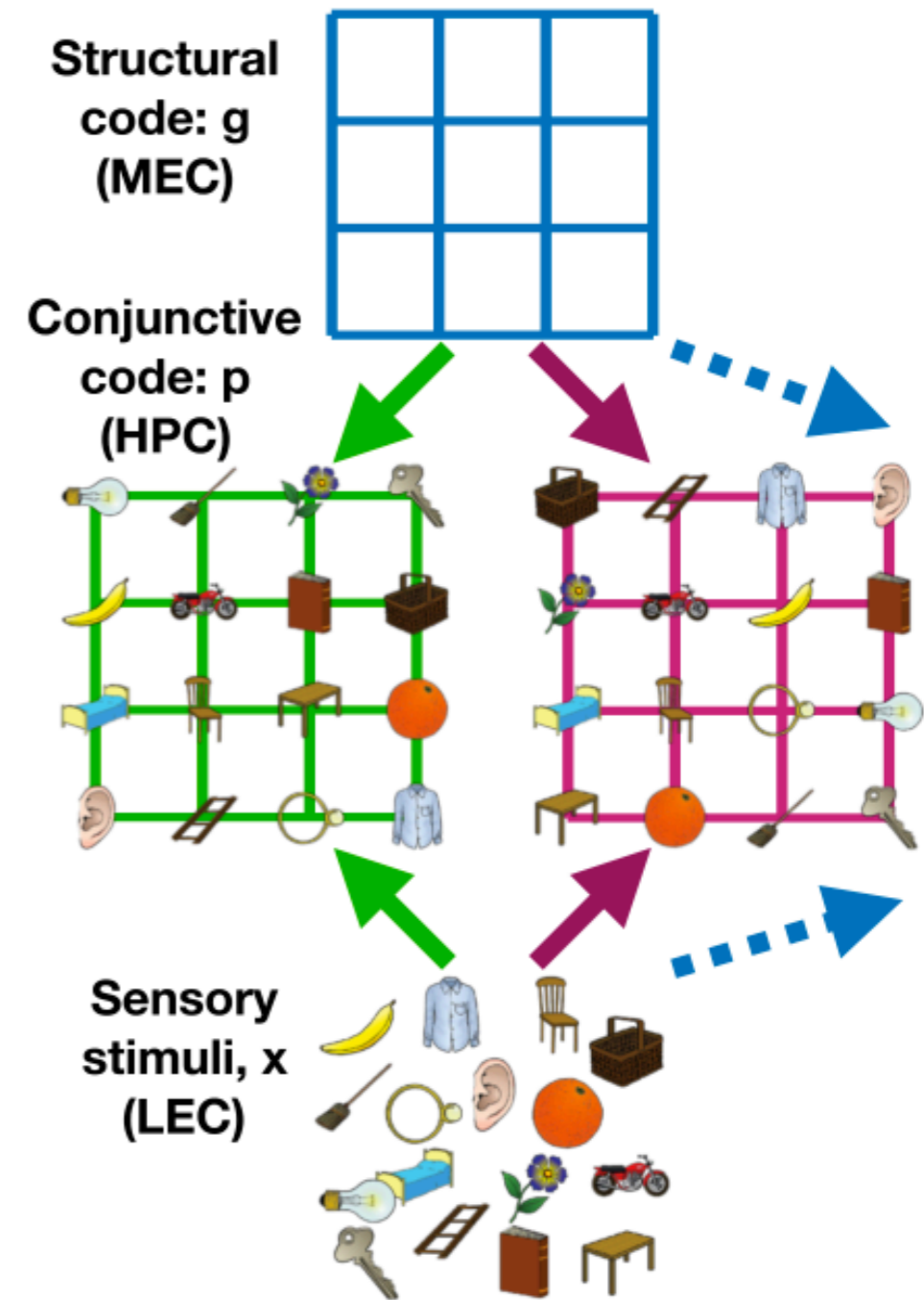
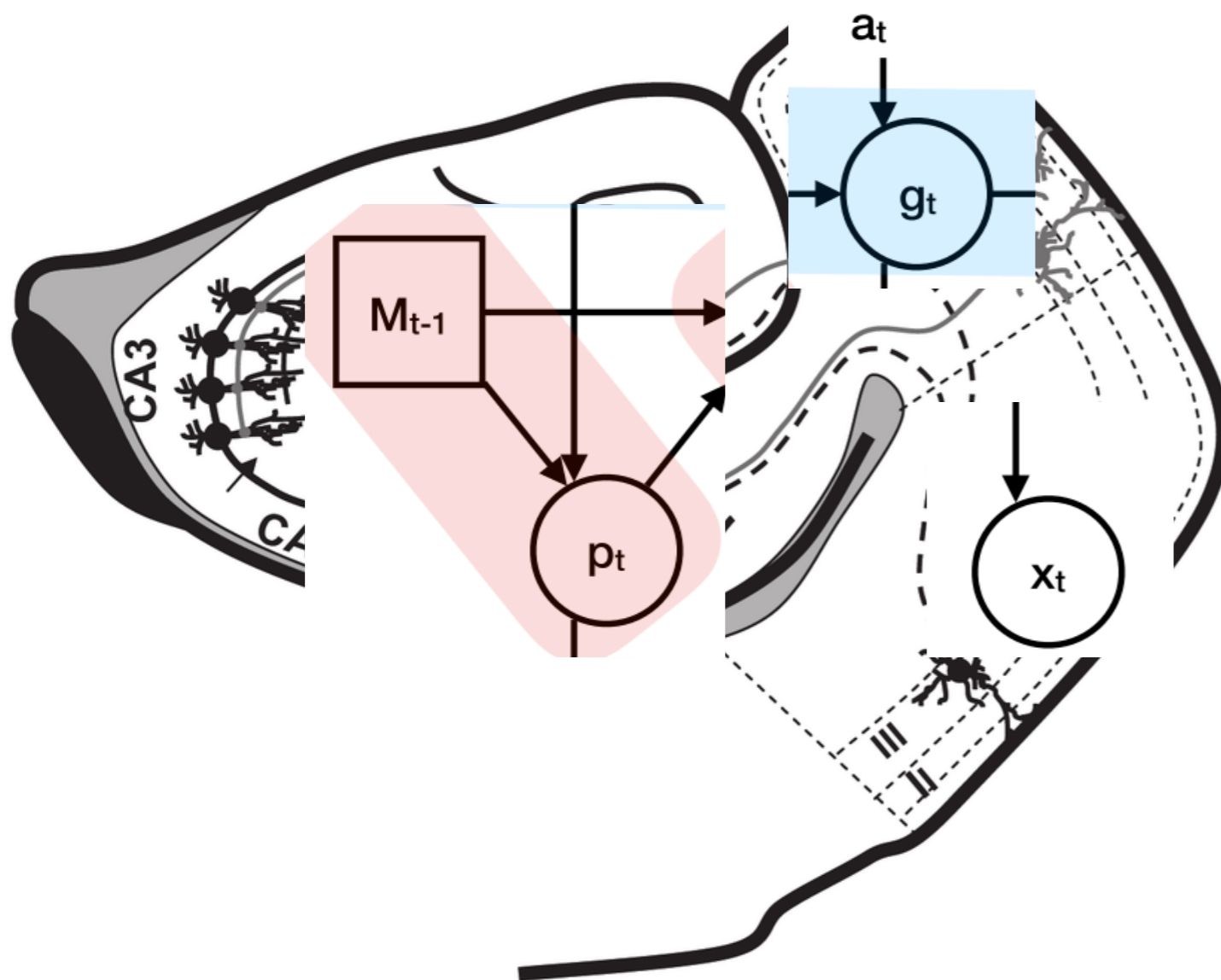
The TEM and the Brain



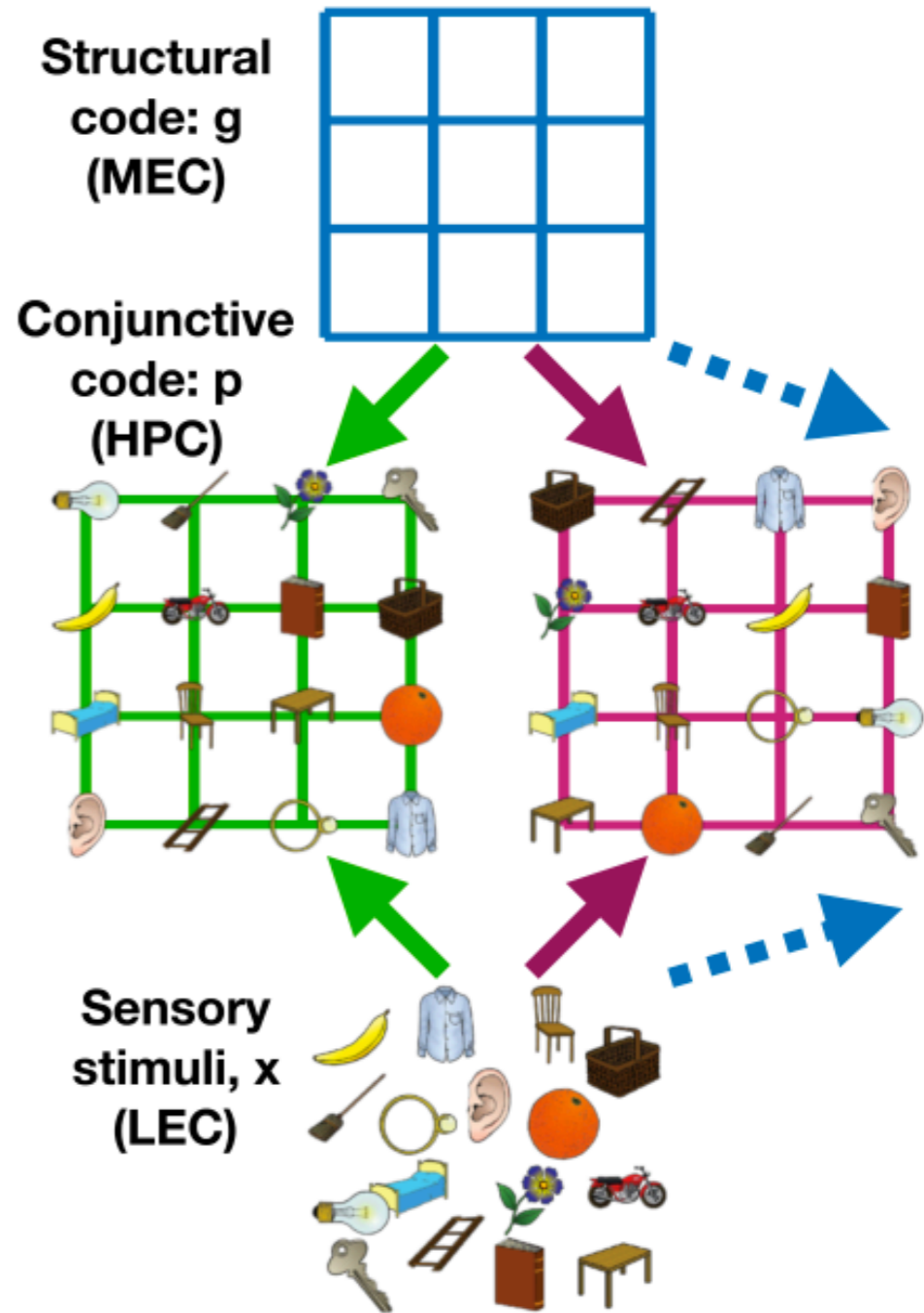
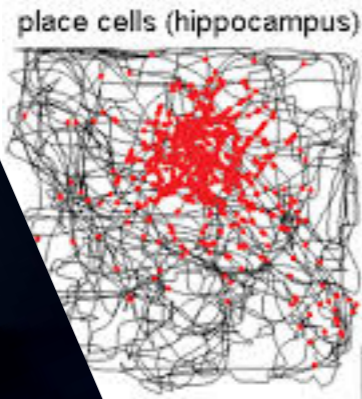
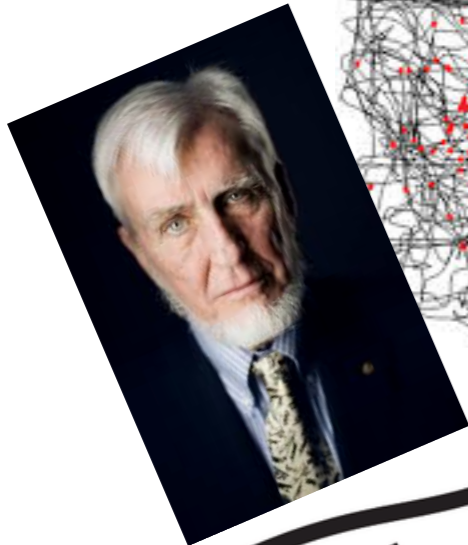
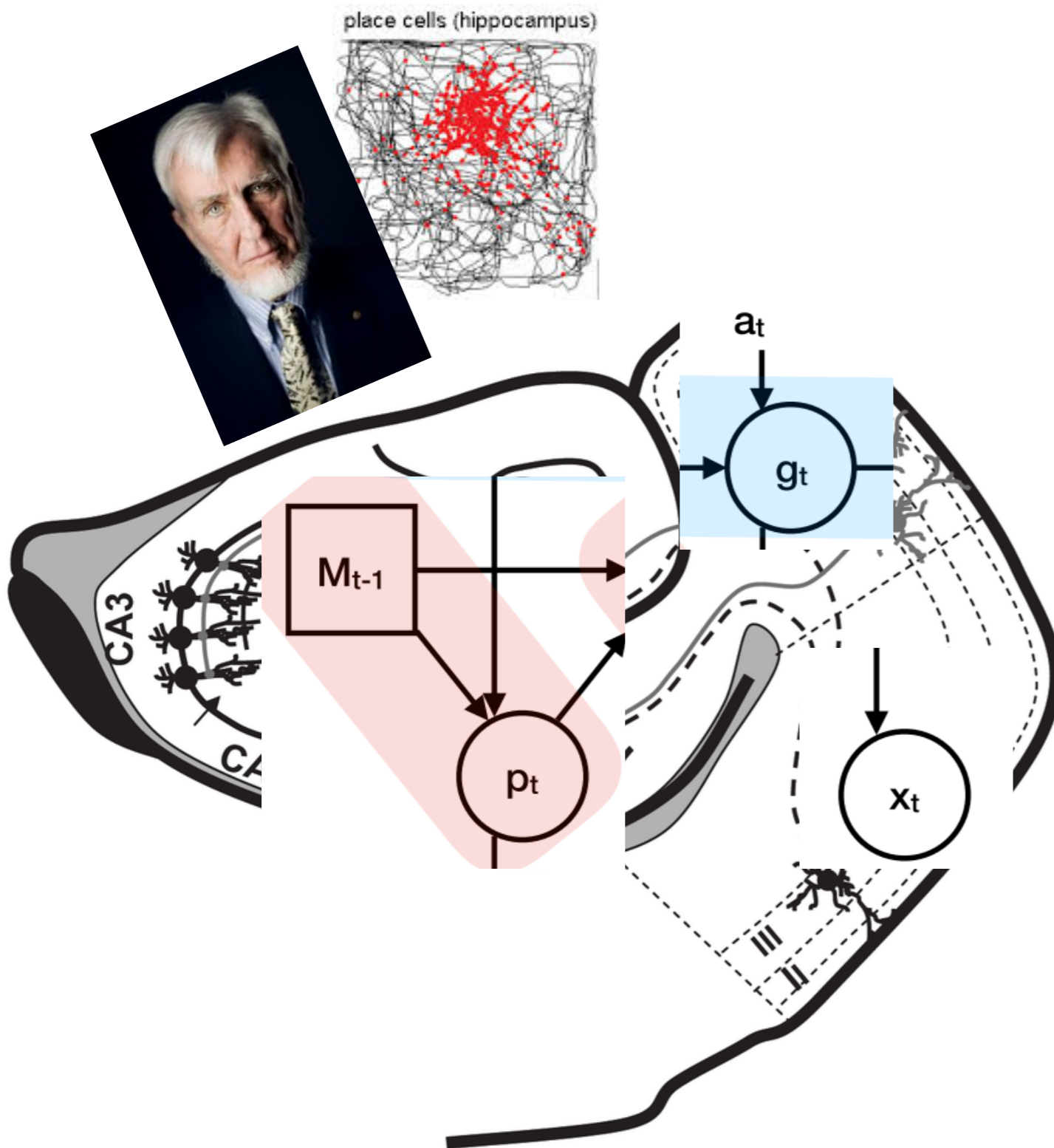
The TEM and the Brain



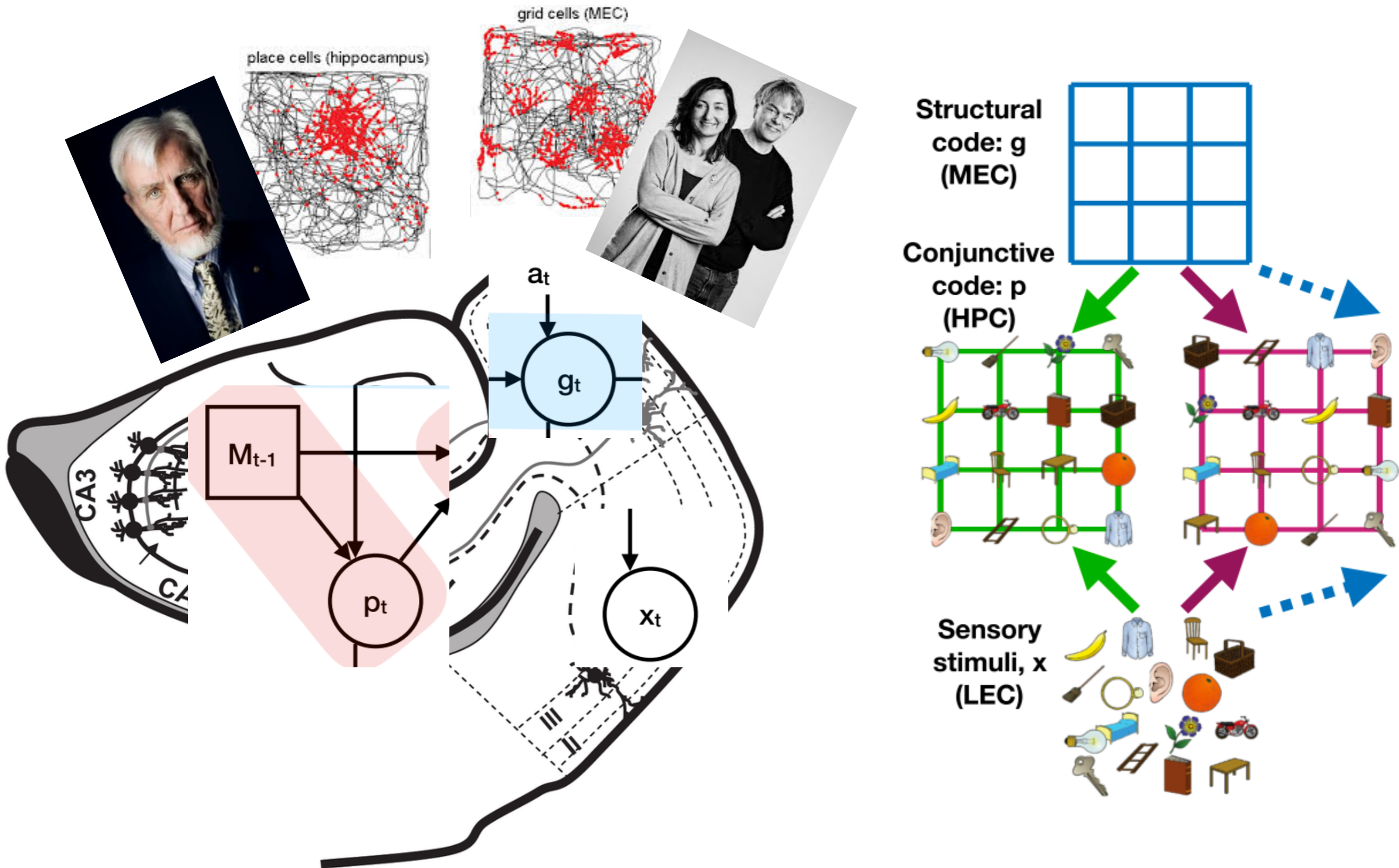
The TEM and the Brain



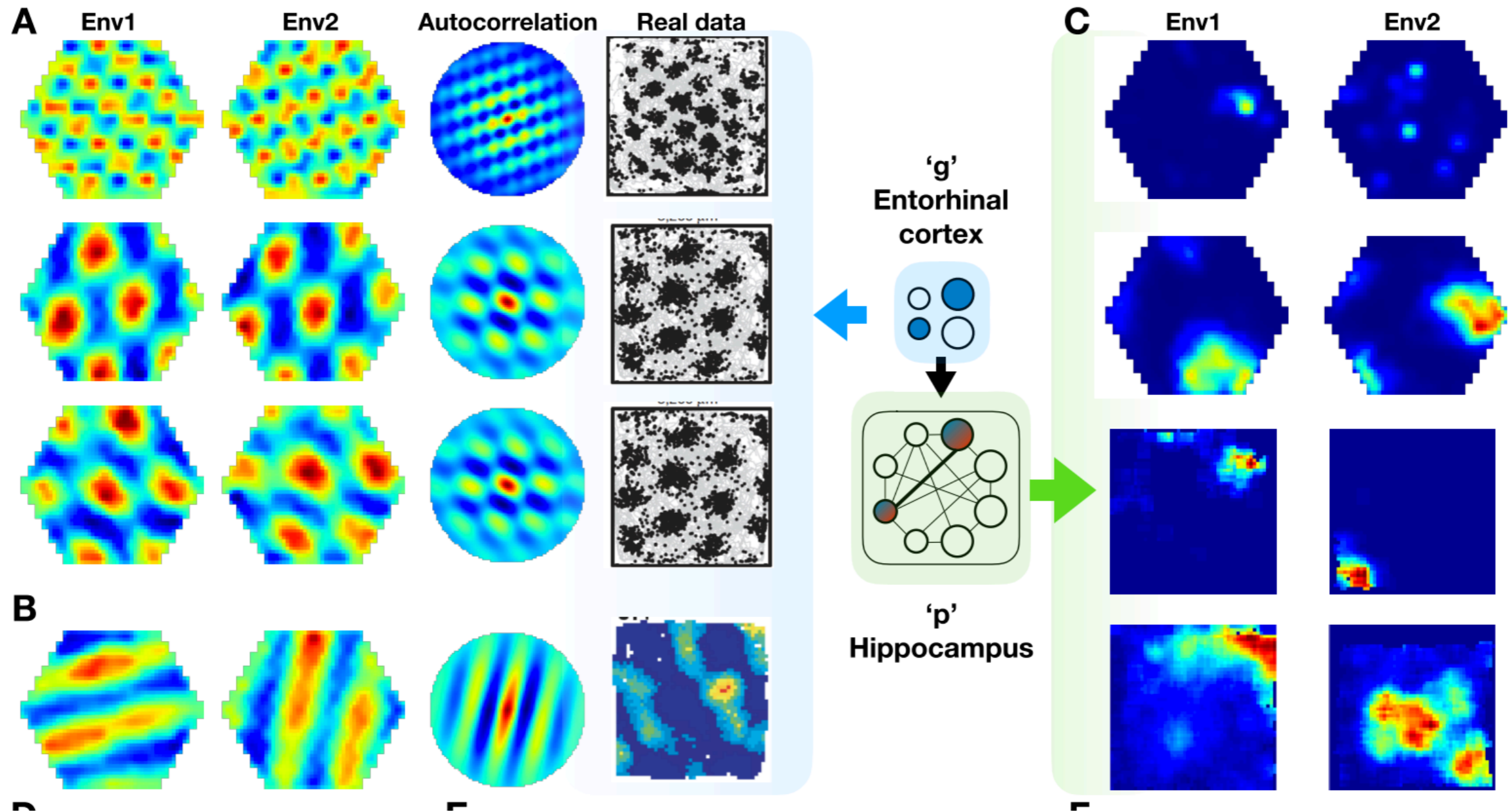
The TEM and the Brain



The TEM and the Brain

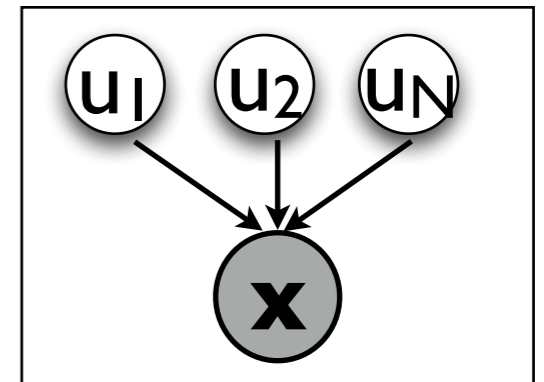


Random movement on



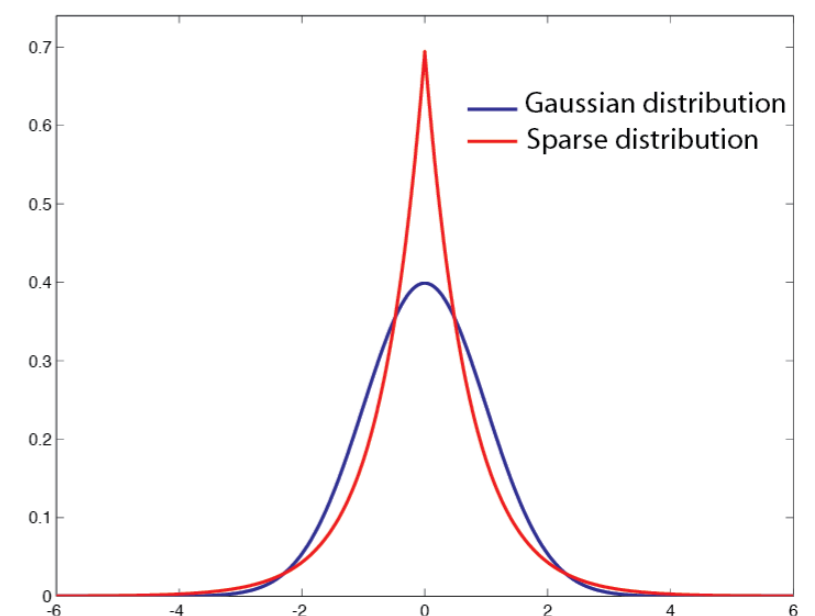
Prediction by parameter learning - A model of V1 receptive fields

- Let's try to model how V1 simple cells work
 - They respond to oriented edges
 - this is what the model should predict!
 - So the model of visual scenes (images of b&w pixels) on this level is that there are some edge-objects that translate to pixels (x) at different locations
- Assumptions for a probabilistic model
 - there is a latent variable (u) for each possible edge
 - their prior distribution is sparse meaning that only a few of them will contribute to single scene
 - they are independent from each other (this is a strong simplification)
 - they mix linearly
 - pixels may deviate from the mix of images according to a Gaussian distribution (this means that there is some observation noise)



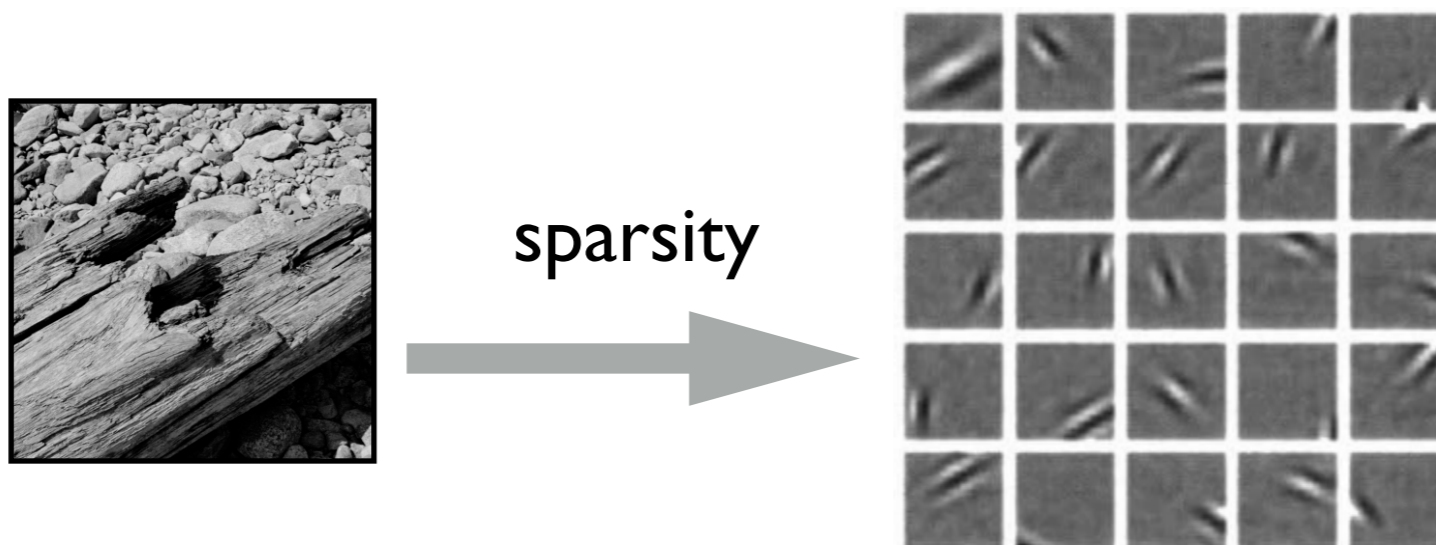
$$p(x | u) = \mathcal{N}(x; Au, \sigma_x I)$$

$$p(u) = \text{Sparse}(u; 0)$$



Learning edge filters from natural images

- a question is how to do the linear mixing of the latents so that they will follow the sparse distribution - that is, what should be the features (A) corresponding to latent variables
 - the algorithm that looks for linear filters for sparsely distributed, independent latent variables is Independent Component Analysis (ICA) - it is used in signal processing, more about similar things when we get to learning
 - If you apply such a procedure, you get features similar to Gabor filters used for edge detection in image processing (Olshausen & Field, 1996)
- The model predicts the shape of V1 simple cell receptive fields assuming sparsity and learning from natural images
 - Another prediction: the average activation (e.g. membrane potential or number of action potentials) of V1 simple cells in response to an image will be proportional with the latent values inferred by the model from the image



The way forward

- We have seen that it is possible to produce falsifiable predictions regarding neural computation by using probabilistic models
- Some predictions of simple models of early vision hold up against measurements from behaving animals
- We have to build more complex models that can predict activity from higher-level visual processing areas, not just V1
 - we may use various state-of-the-art techniques from machine learning
- Step by step, we have to figure out what is the mental representation of the environment

What do we know about how the brain works?

- We know a lot about anatomy
 - but we still don't have the connectome - the blueprint of neural networks in the brain
 - local connectivity patterns within cortical regions are also only partially known
- We know a lot about dynamics
 - we can describe single neuron and network level electric behaviour patterns
 - but mostly without tying them to any function to prediction
- We know a lot about localisation
 - low-level perceptual functionality, motor areas, episodic memory, etc.
 - some hints about other functions
- We know a lot of receptive fields
 - if we looked for all the right quantities of the stimuli when we characterised them
 - for objects and concepts we have only hints
- We know a lot about how to solve problems the brain has to solve
 - specialised solutions exist, mostly to perceptual stuff, no general problem solvers
 - we have no idea how plausible these solutions are regarding biological implementation
- We know a little about the mental model and how to do inference in it