Intelligent Autonomous Robotics

Exploiting physics

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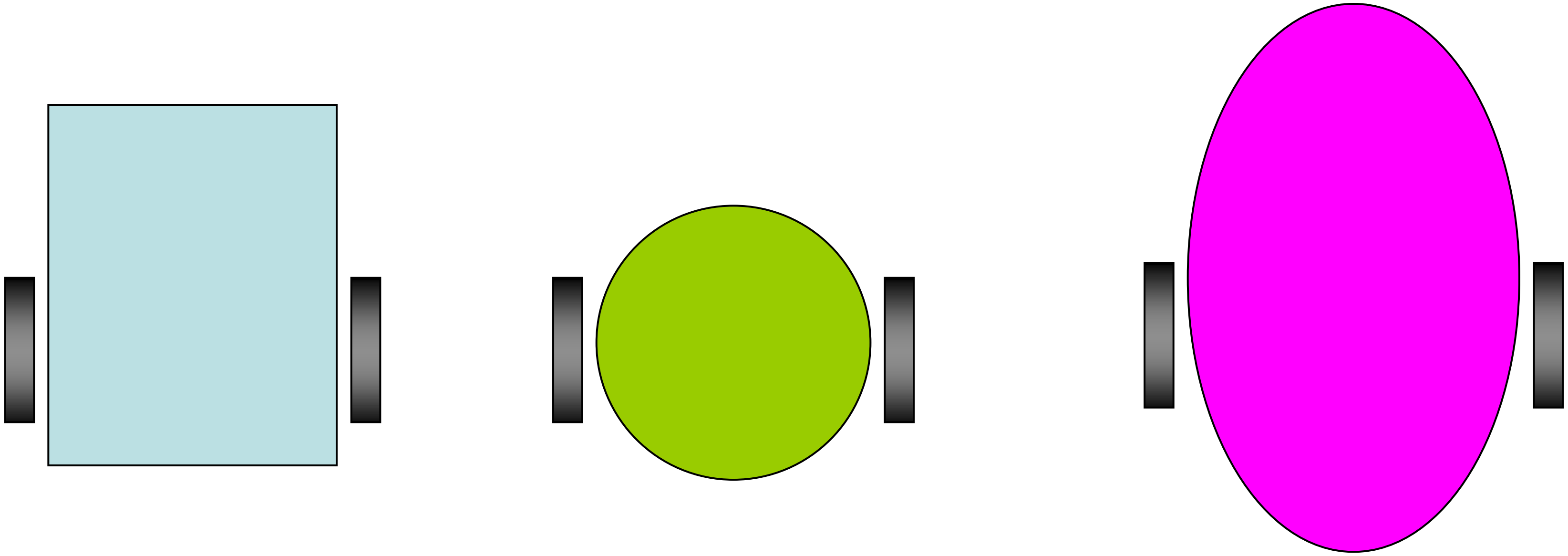
Physics

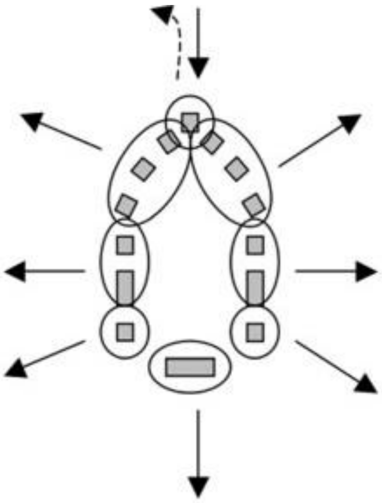
- Our aim is robots that interact with the world.
- The physics of this interaction are a hard constraint; we can’t beat it; and its better not to fight it.
- Sometimes the structure of the robot and the world can be used directly for successful interaction
  - Use the mechanical forces exerted on the robot to shape its movement
  - Design and position sensors to match the world and thus extract the immediate information needed for control

What shape would you choose for a robot that must not get stuck in an office environment?

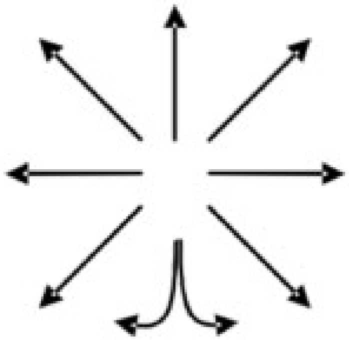


The right shape can solve the problem.

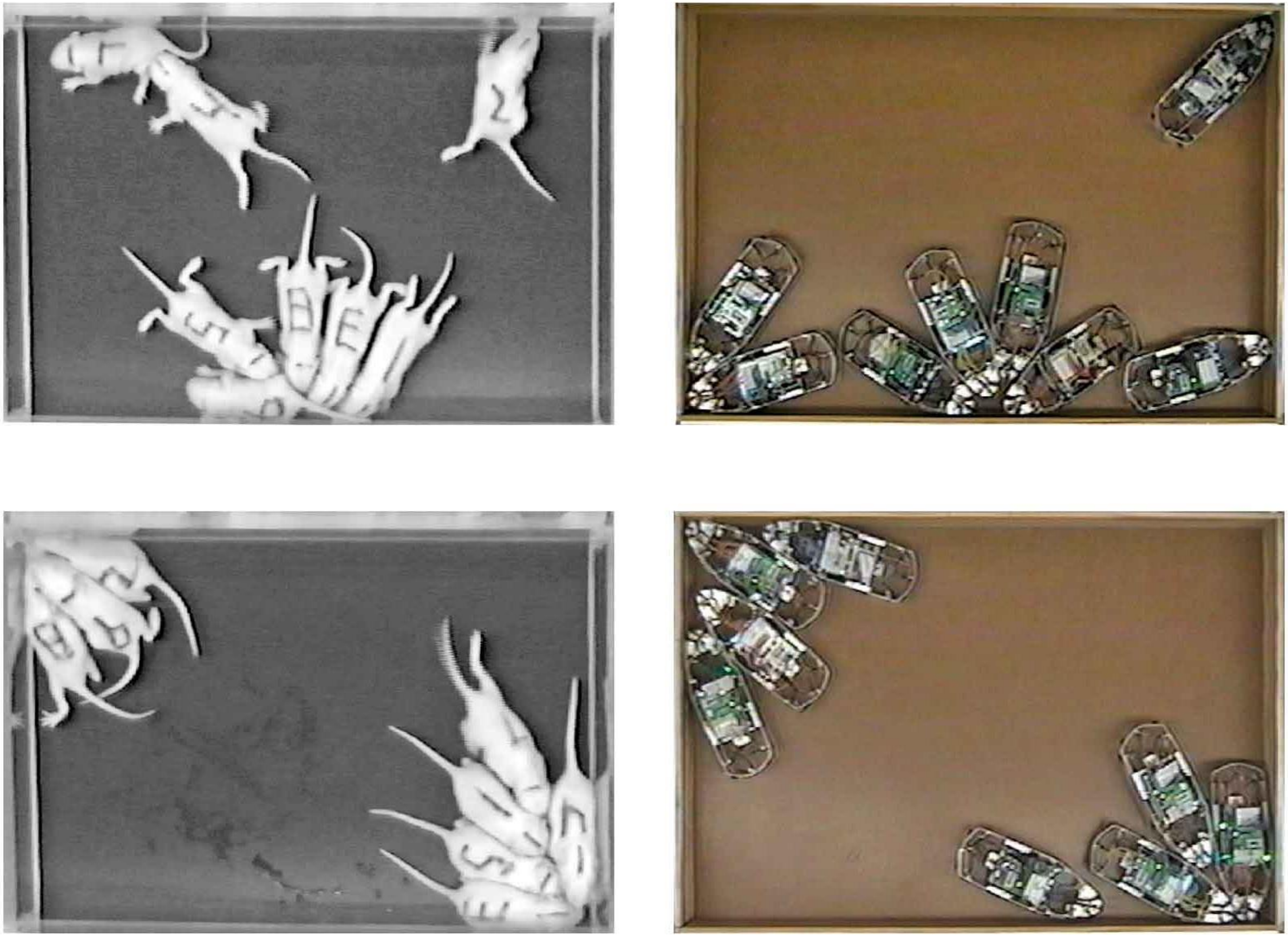
- May et al (2006)
- Infant rat pups huddle together and in corners
    - Assumed to be thigmotaxis behaviour: orientation towards contact with objects or other rats.
- Robots designed to replicate this behaviour:
    - Scale robot and arena size at 4:1
    - Shape robot with rounded snout
    - Tactile sensing clustered around the nose
    - Differential drive at rear like rodent back legs
- Programmed to react to touch by turning in that direction
- *OR* (as control experiment) to move in a random direction every 2 seconds (i.e. ignoring sensors)
- Random robots produced very rat-like behaviour!



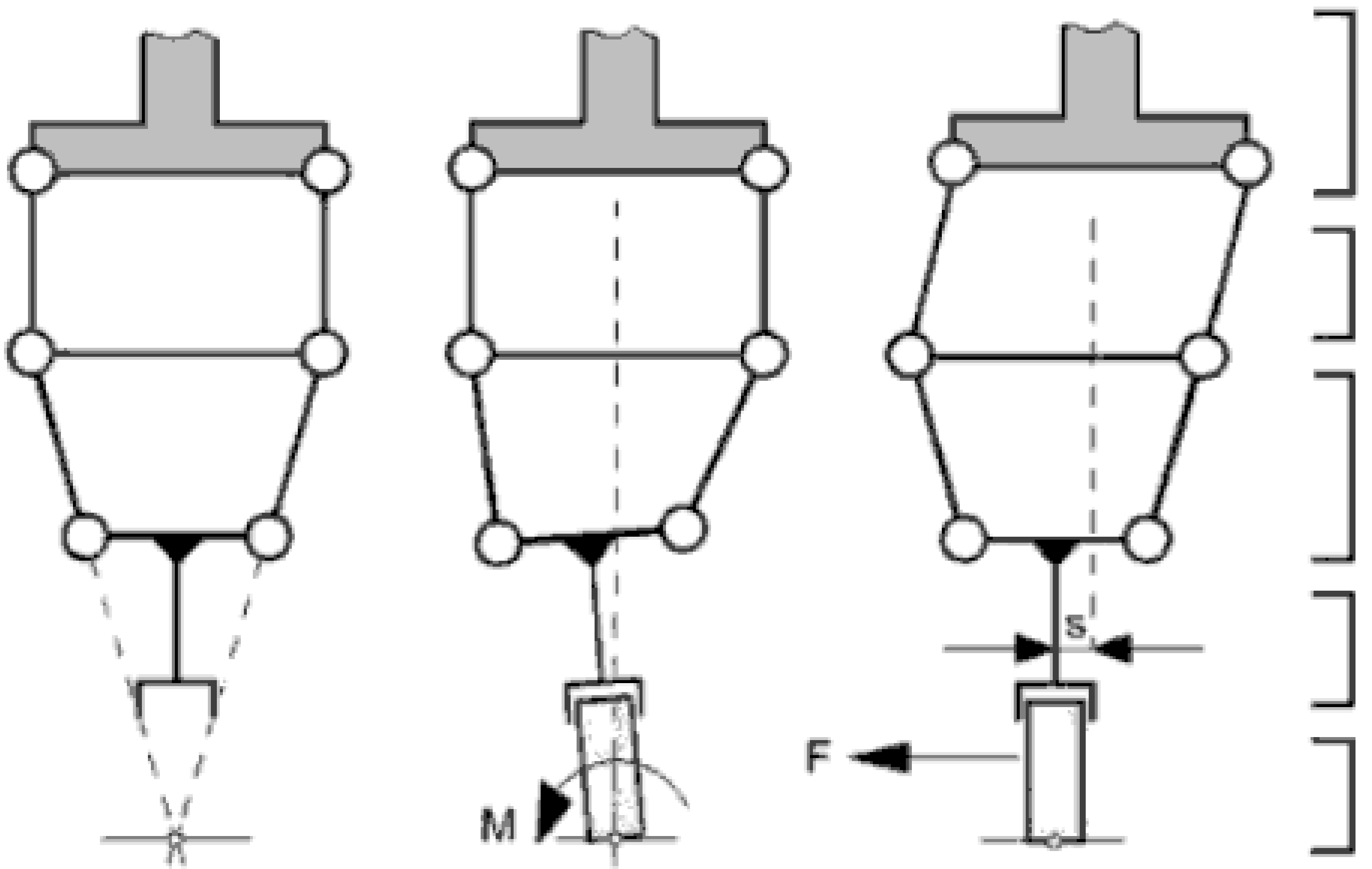
Respond to touch



Make random move



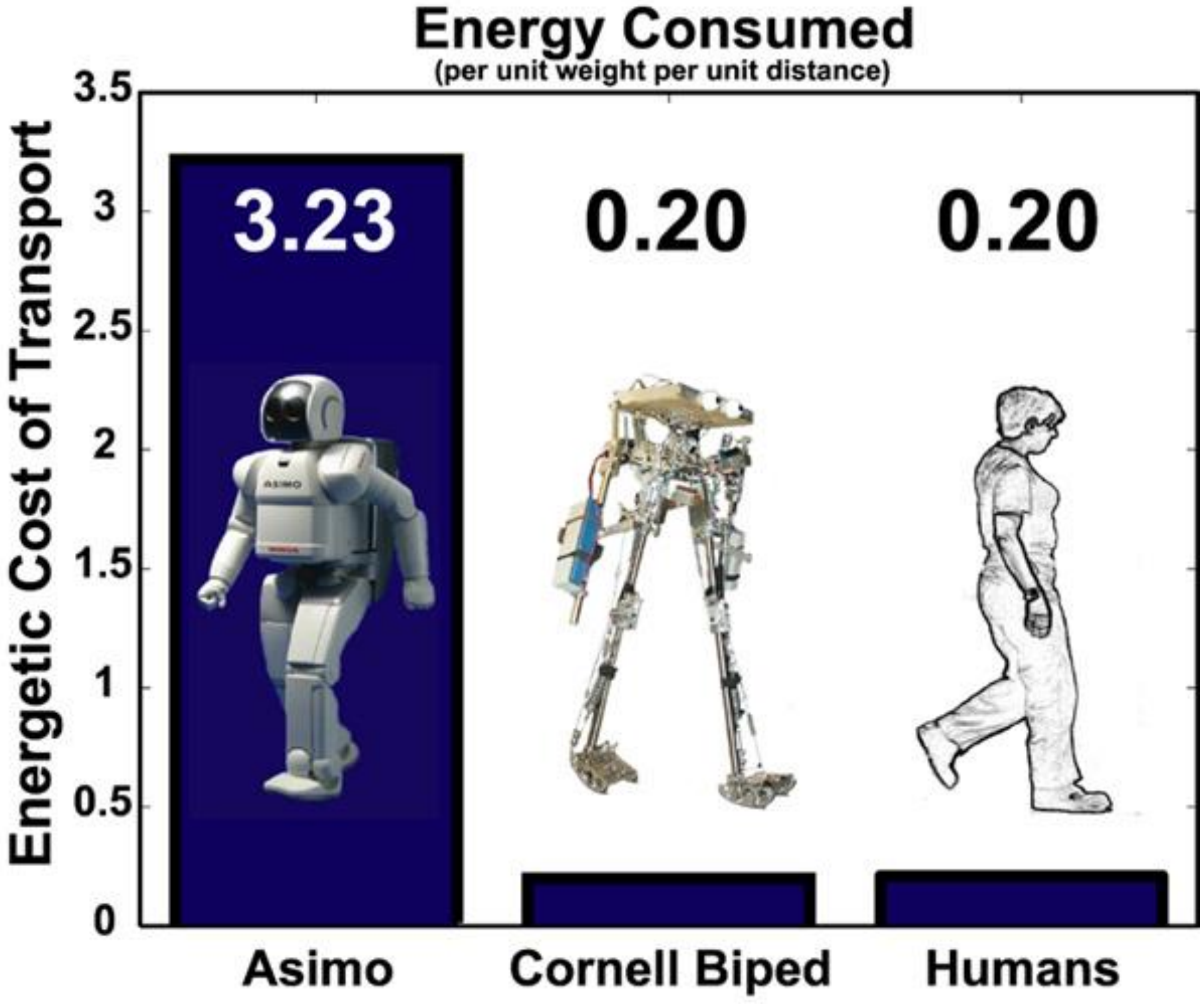
construction torque loading shear force loading



From Robot Grippers, Monkman et. al (2007)

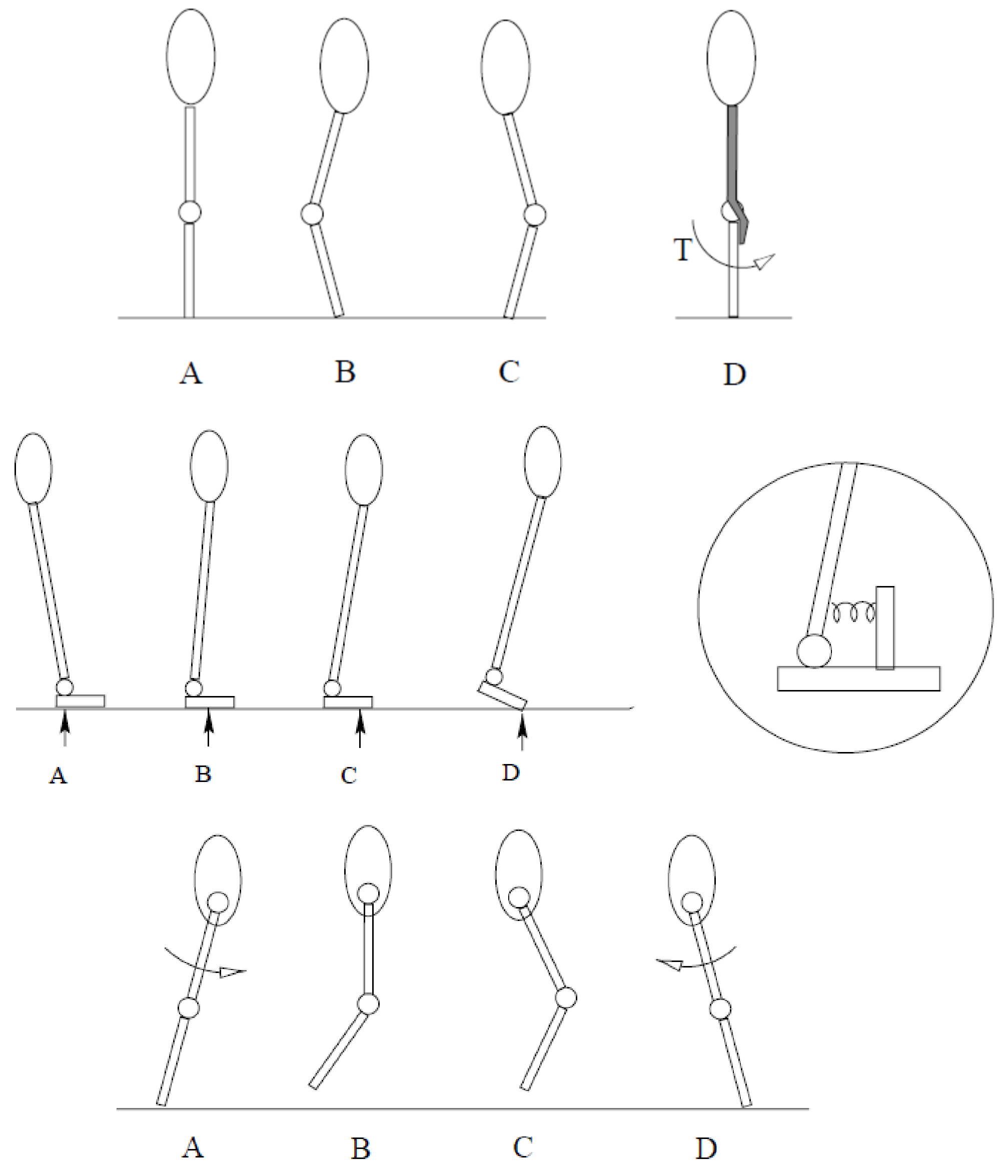
Universal robotic gripper based on jamming of granular material
(Brown et al, 2010)

Using gravity (Collins, et al 2005)



Natural dynamics for bipedal walking

- Pratt & Pratt, 1998
- Keeping knee straight is difficult, unless add knee cap
- Foot allows support for moving centre of mass, compliant ankle deals with increased torque and provides ‘toe off’
- Exploiting passive swing in two part leg, get natural stride from actuating only hip joint
- Get low power robot, and stable speed without explicit speed control

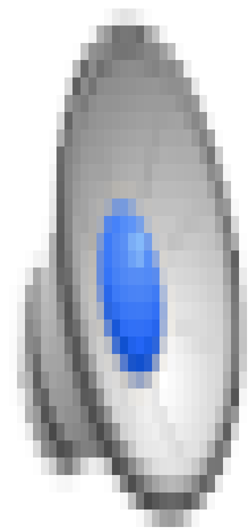


Spring flamingo

http://www.ai.mit.edu/projects/leglab/

We can exploit chaotic dynamics to produce “random” searching behaviour

- Fruitfly maggots explore 2D environments through a sequence of runs and turns
- Does the brain decide which way to go?
- Simulation shows that seemingly “random” exploration can result from chaotic body mechanics
- Simulated nervous system does not explicitly sense or control body bend, nor does it initiate turns
- Not (yet) instantiated in a robotic platform

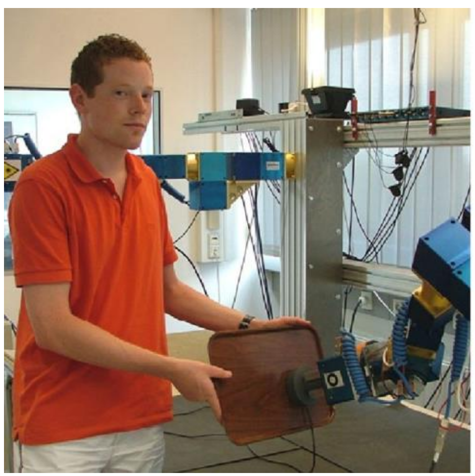


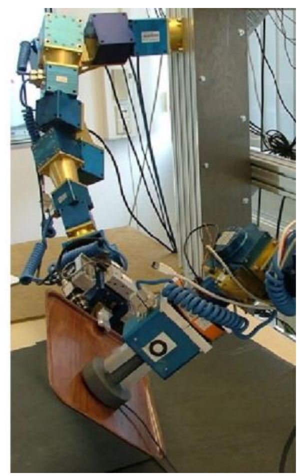
Converting energy for control

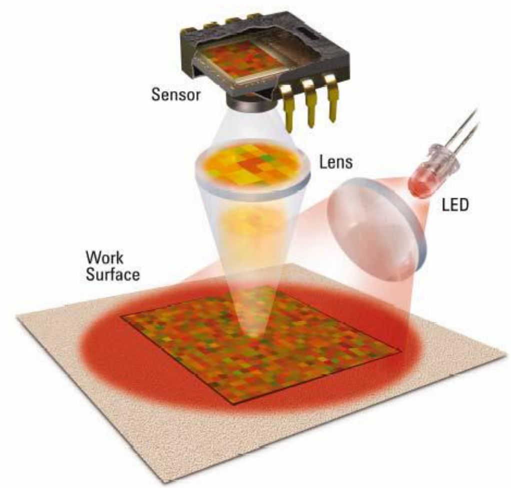
- So far discussing examples of harnessing forces and energy in the world for direct robot control
  - E.g. using gravity to produce leg swing
  - E.g. using shape of robot and environment to force diversion towards or away from something
- But we have a lot more flexibility if we can use energy and forces indirectly
  - E.g. convert light energy to wheel speed to approach lamp
  - Have input-output connections that are positive, negative, thresholded, or any other arbitrary relationship
  - Have input-output connections dependent on circumstances, or dependent on the past or future…

Designing and distributing sensors

- Installation or invention of a new sensor might solve a robotics problem
- Example: robot arm following a trajectory to finish or wipe a surface, greatly simplified by end-effector-mounted slip sensor based on optic mouse principle (Milighetti & Kuntze, 2008)





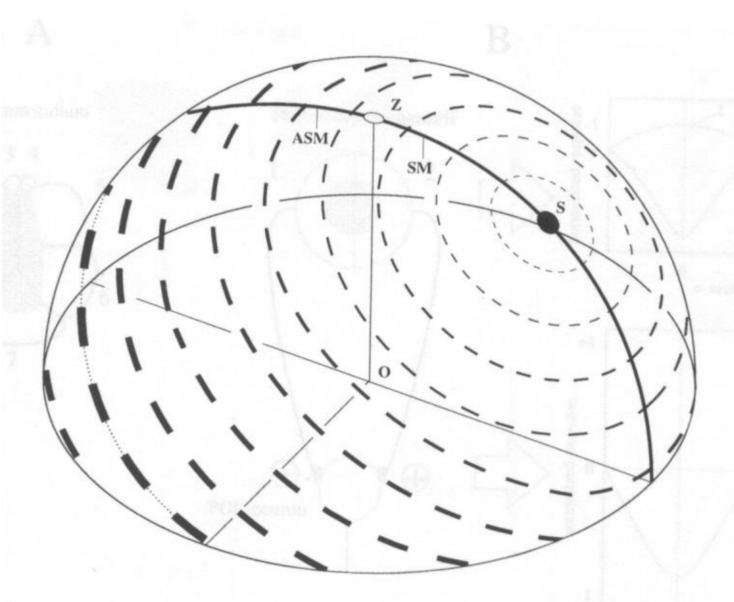


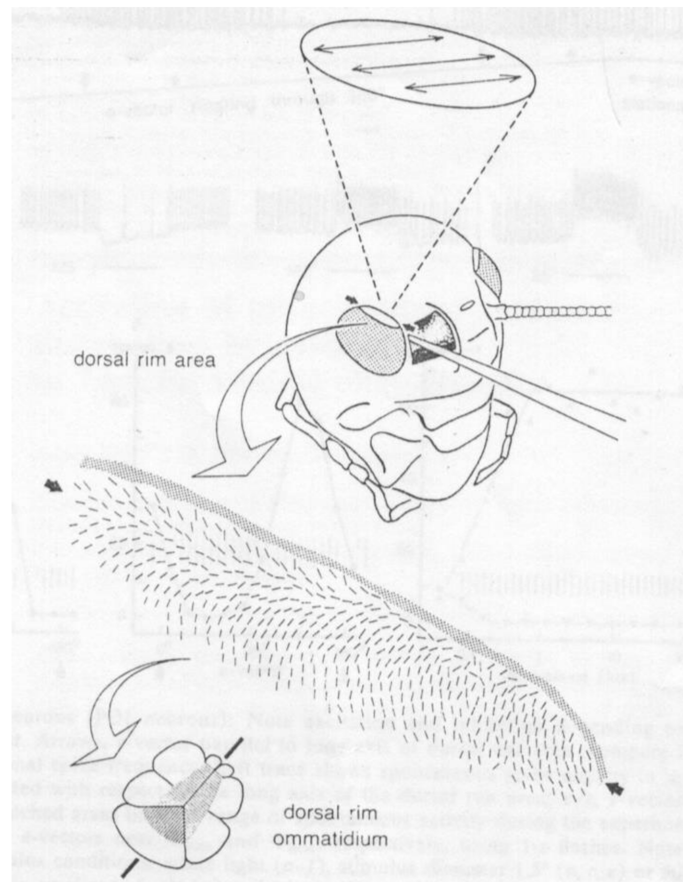
- GPS has made significant difference to the robot navigation problem

Polarised light compass

Desert ants (and many other animals) have visual receptors tuned to the polarisation plane of light.

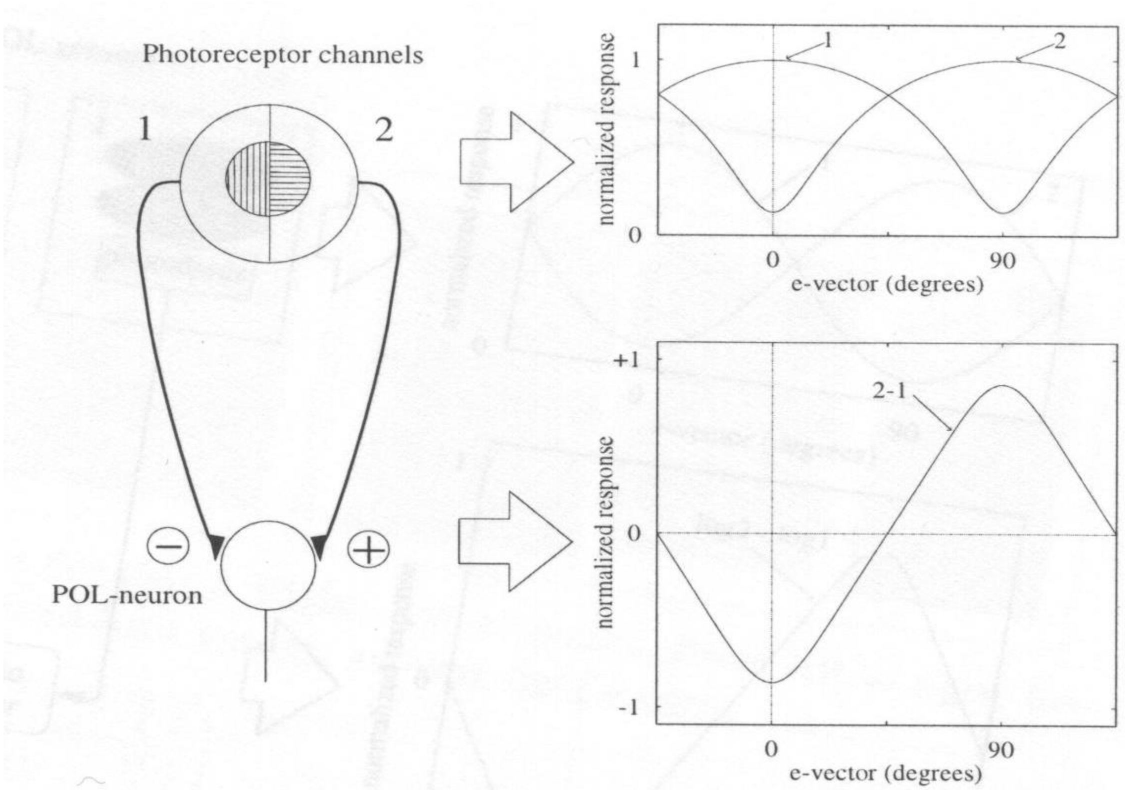
Skylight has a natural polarisation pattern





Polarised light compass

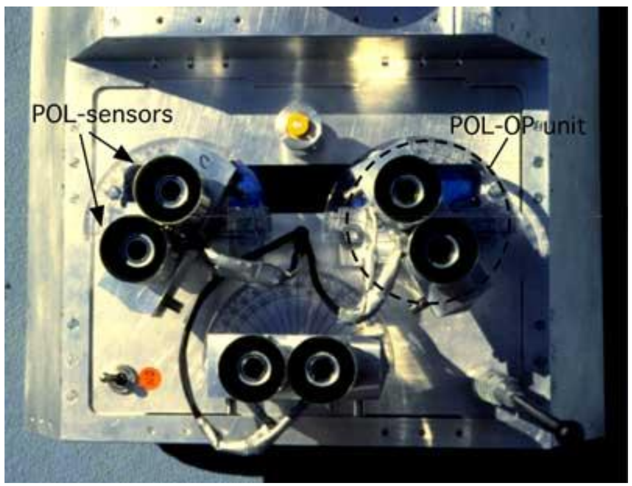
The receptors are tuned in orthogonal directions, and opponent processing by ‘POL-neurons’ produces an intensity-independent response.

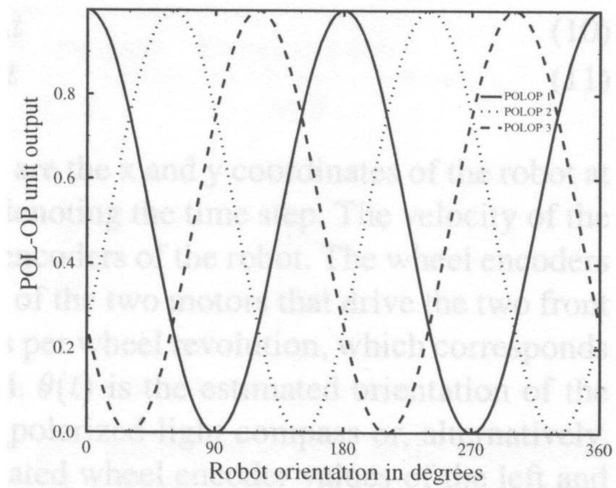


Polarised light compass

This mechanism has been replicated on the Sahabot.

Uses three pairs of sensors oriented at 60 degree axes.



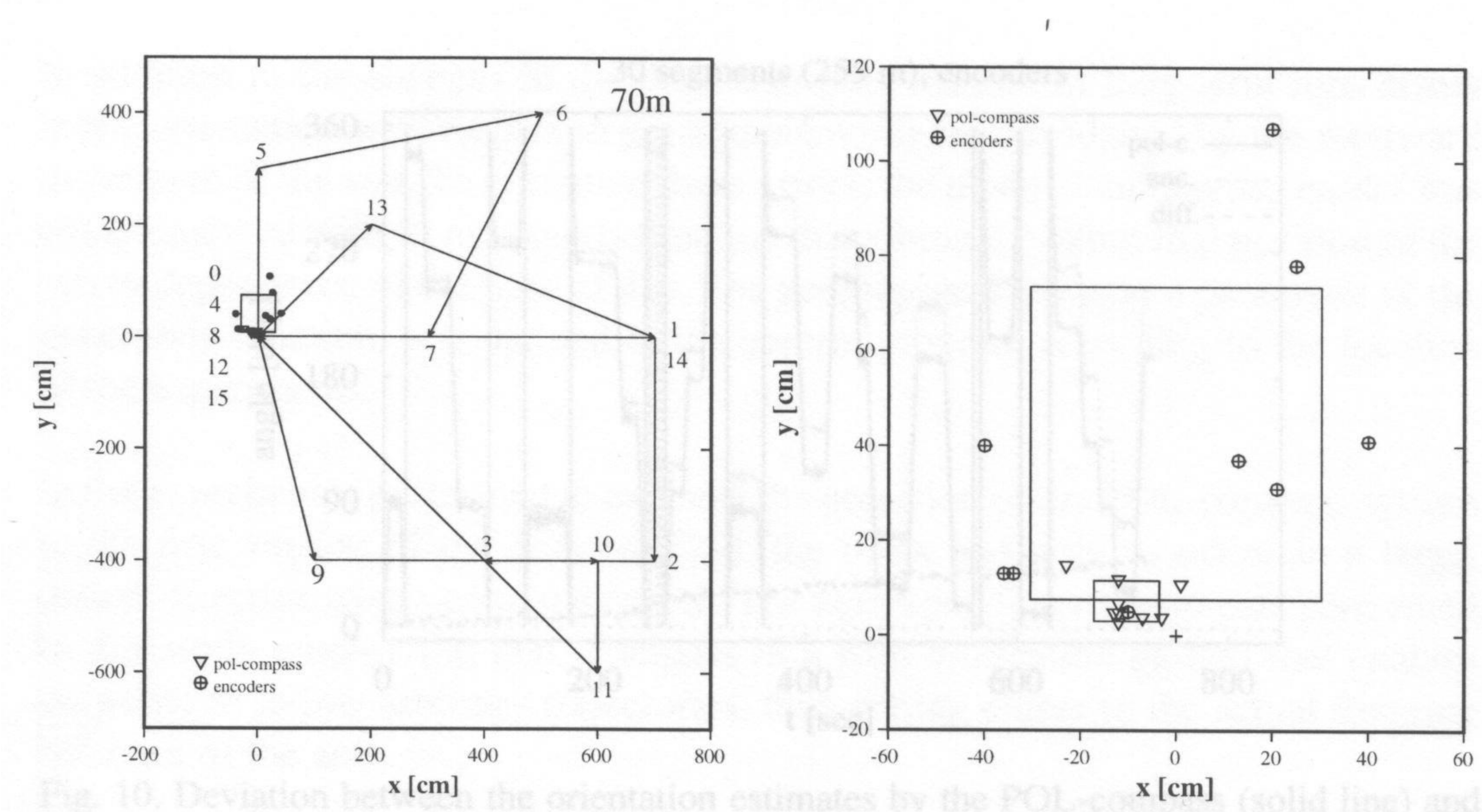


Can create lookup table to determine direction indicated by output ratios of the three sensors.

180 degree ambiguity resolved by sensing sun direction.

Polarised light compass

Results of path integration using polarised light compass : much more accurate than odometry



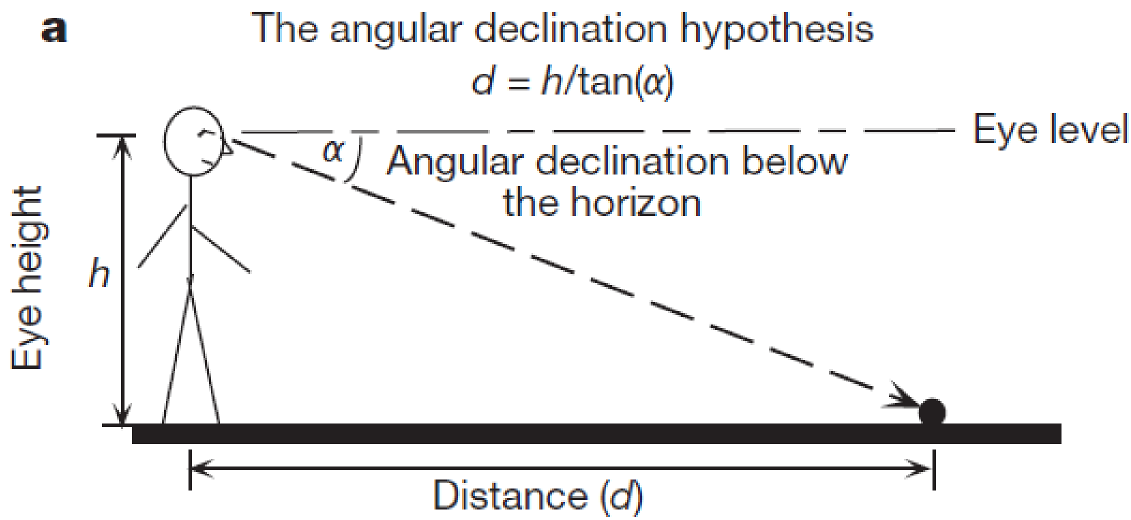
Sahabot in the Tunisian desert

Exploiting physics for sensing

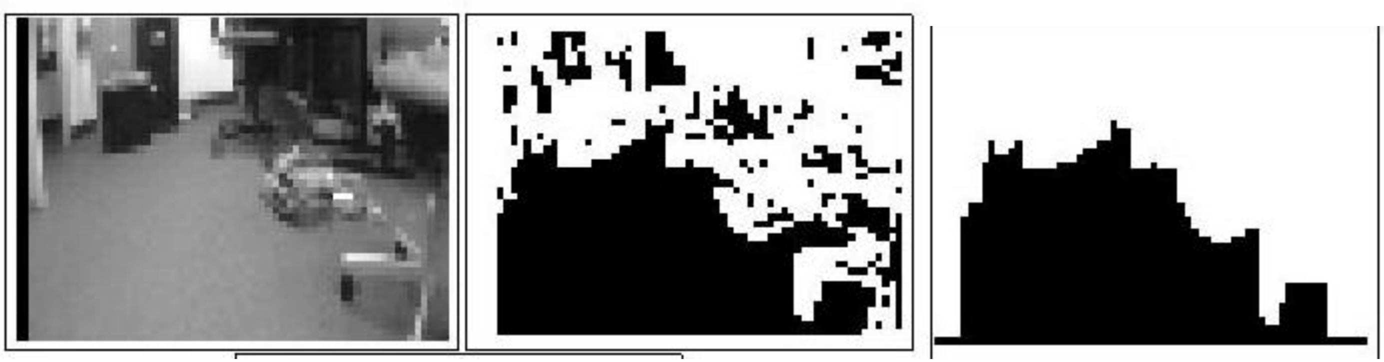
- A common mistake is to assume we must reconstruct veridical world properties from sensor data:
  – E.g. robot needs to map distance and angle of all obstacles; depth information requires range sensor or stereo
- Actually only need to extract whatever is required for execution of appropriate action:
  – Egocentric, robot-relative co-ordinates
  – May be simple/single property that suffices for control (but may still need to do some sensor processing to get it)

How to determine distance without stereo

If the ground plane is flat, there is a simple relationship between visual angle and distance to the base of an object on the ground (Ooi et al, 2001)



Using on a robot: Filter image for ground vs. texture (=object); then height of ground in image gives distance to object (Horswill, 1993)



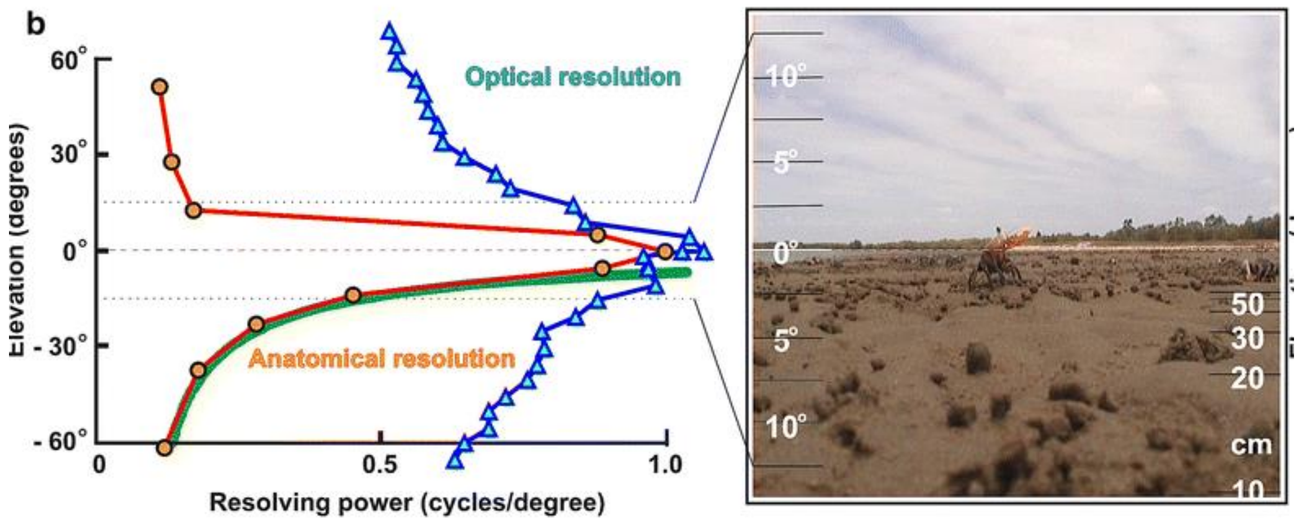
Living in a flat world: the fiddler crab

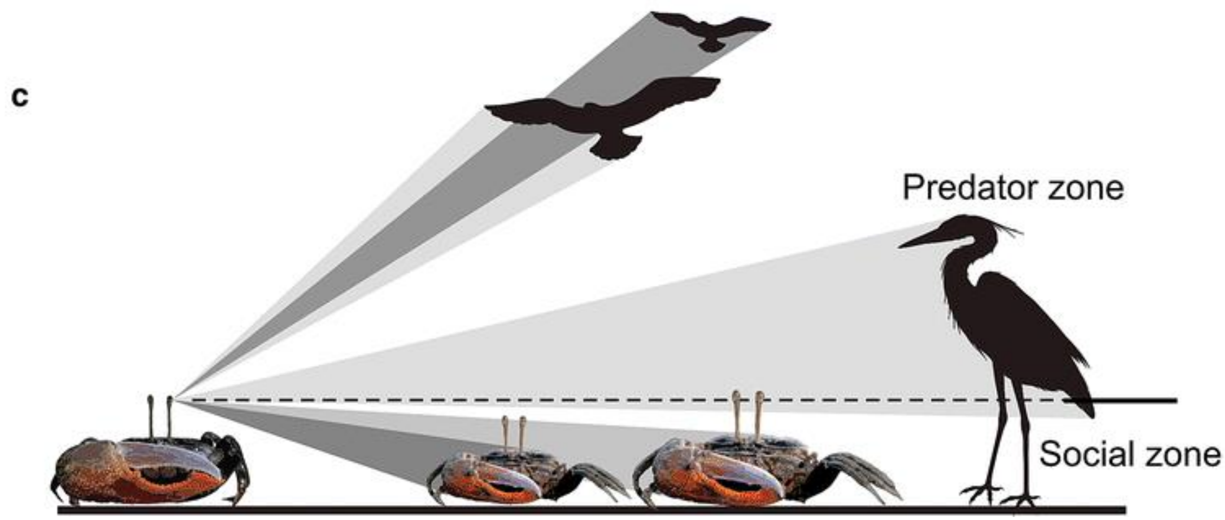
Zeil & Hemmi, 2005

-Raised eye stalk aligns eye with horizon

- Anything above the horizon is a predator, anything below a fellow crab

-Resolution (number of ommatidia) greatly increased around horizon, this gives effective *size constancy* for approaching animals





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