

Time series analyses in Paleobiology

Lee Hsiang Liow

Natural History Museum and Centre for Planetary Habitability, University of Oslo, Norway

Analytical Paleobiology Workshop
(Paleosynthesis, FAU, Erlangen)
3.9.2025 (Monday)

What are timeseries (TS) data

What are time series analyses?

Timeseries (TS)

- set of values in sequence representing a variable value at different points in time
- measures collected at **regular time intervals**** resulting in a set of ordered values
- sampling adjacent points in time introduces a **correlation in the data**
- From a **statistical perspective**, the impact of time resulting from **repeated measurements** over time on a single subject or unit, introduce a **dependency among data points** which *prevents the use of some of the most common statistical techniques*

Objectives of time series analyses

- **DESCRIPTION**

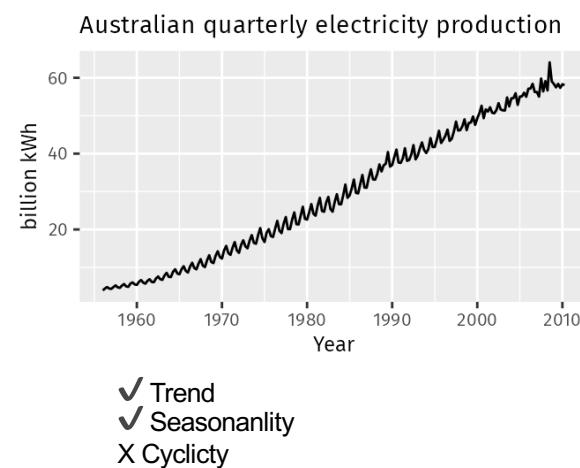
- Temporal trend?
- Peak at some point?
- Repeated patterns?

- **EVALUATION & EXPLANATION**

- Impact of a certain event (Before and After)
- “Drivers” of processes.

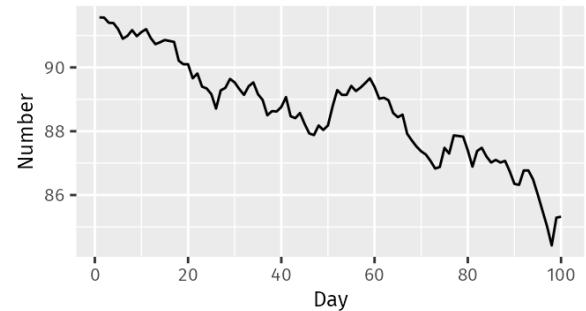
- **FORECASTING**

- Prediction of the future values of a process

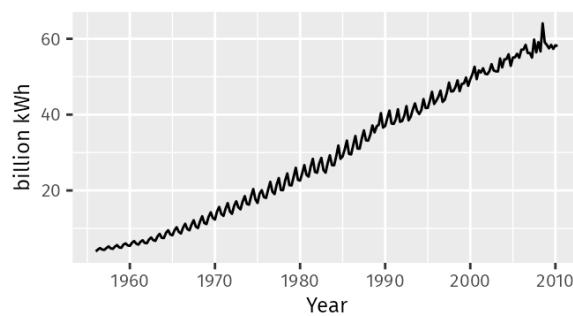


✓ Trend
X Seasonanlity
X Cyclity

US treasury bill contracts



Australian quarterly electricity production



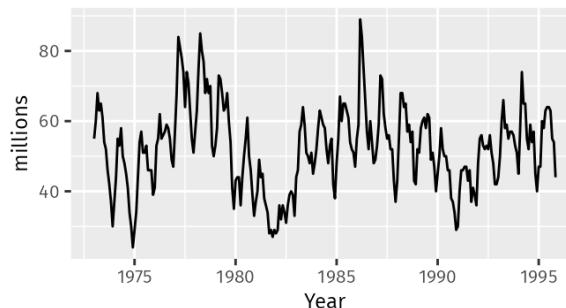
✓ Trend
✓ Seasonanlity
X Cyclity

X Trend

✓ Seasonanlity

✓ Cyclicty

Sales of new one-family houses, USA

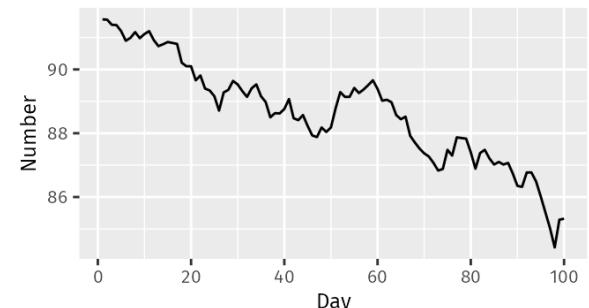


✓ Trend

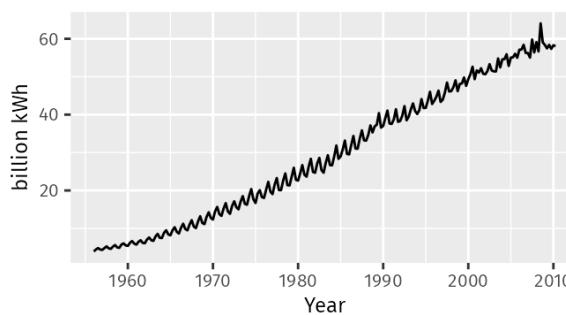
X Seasonanlity

X Cyclicty

US treasury bill contracts



Australian quarterly electricity production



✓ Trend

✓ Seasonanlity

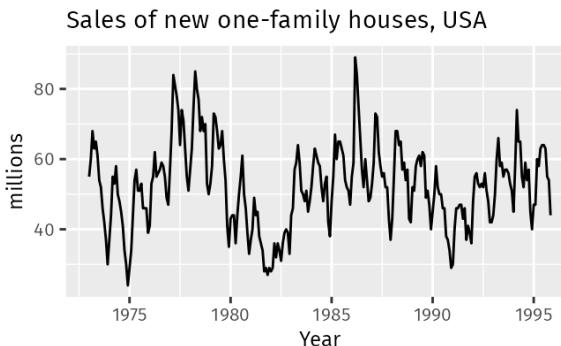
X Cyclicty

Trends:
long-term increase or decrease in the data

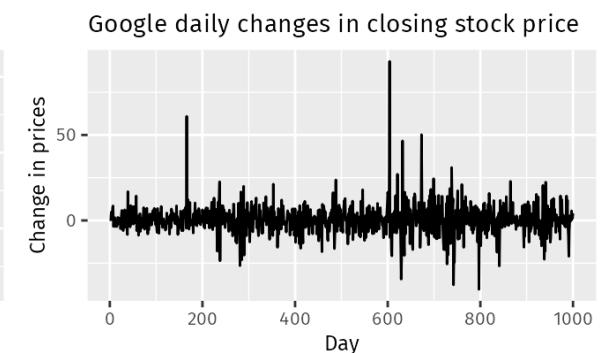
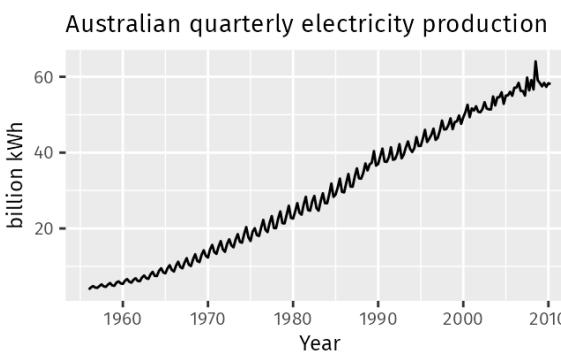
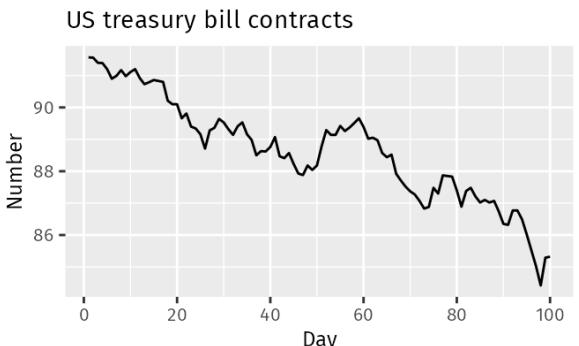
Seasonal:
affected by seasonal factors e.g. time of the year or the day of the week:
always of a fixed and known frequency

Cyclic:
exhibit rises and falls that are not of a fixed frequency

- X Trend
- ✓ Seasonality
- ✓ Cyclicity



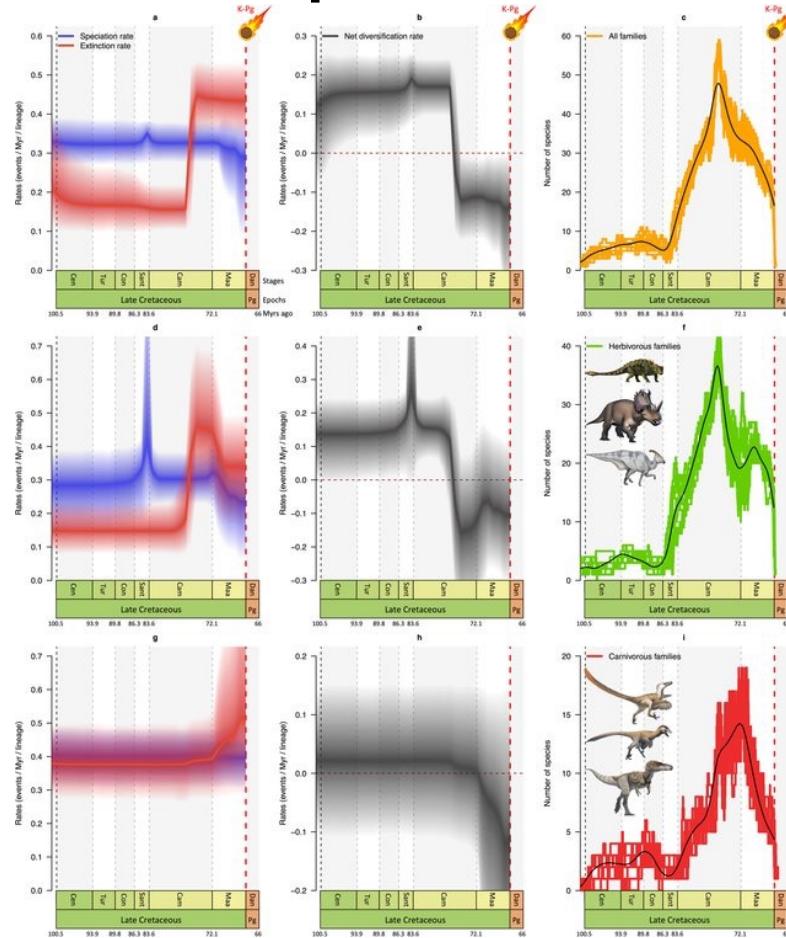
- ✓ Trend
- X Seasonality
- X Cyclicity



- ✓ Trend
- ✓ Seasonality
- X Cyclicity

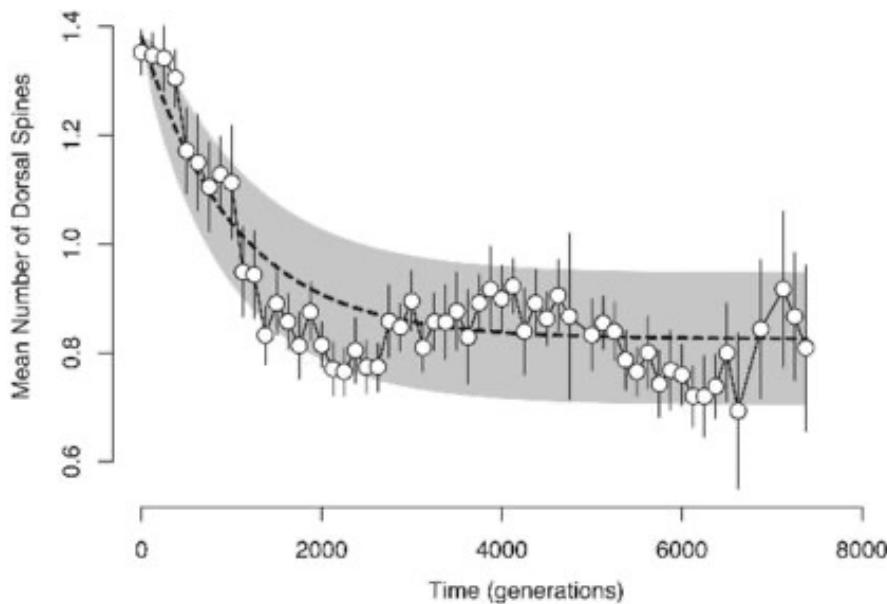
- X Trend
- X Seasonality
- X Cyclicity

Some paleontological time series



Condamine *et al.* Dinosaur biodiversity declined well before the asteroid impact, influenced by ecological and environmental pressures. *Nat Commun* **12**, 3833 (2021).
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-23754-0>

Some paleontological time series

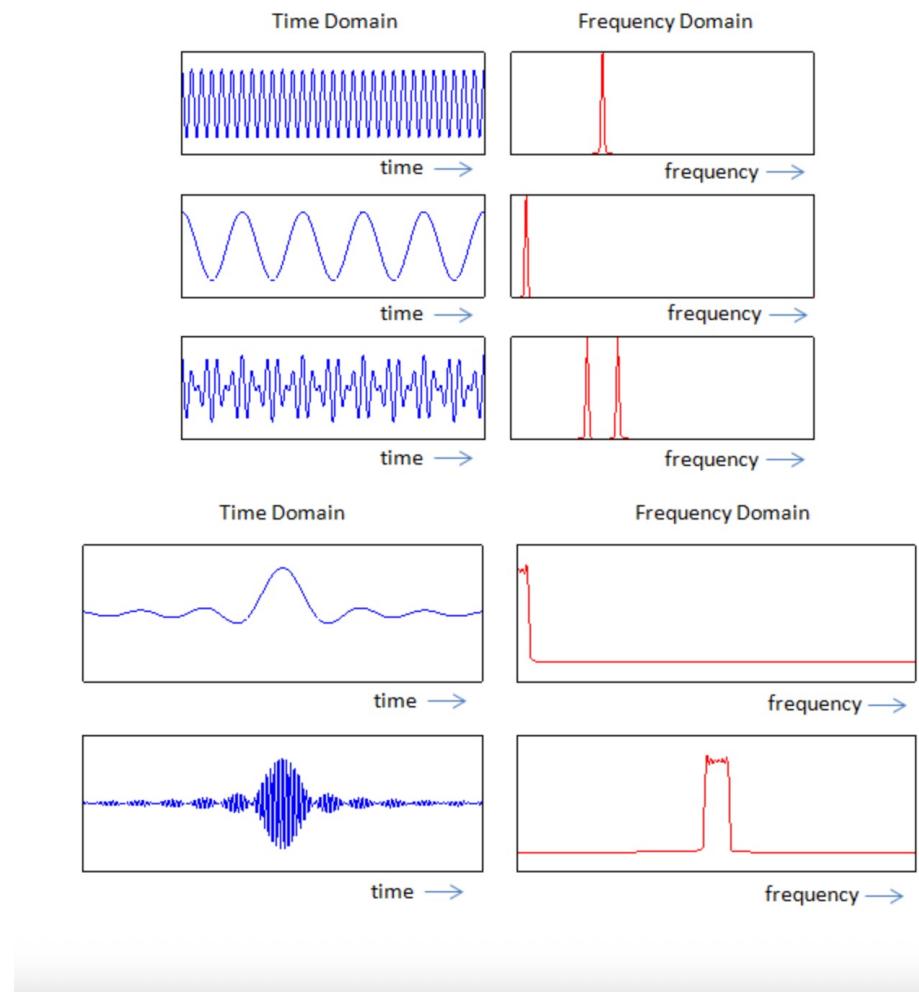


<https://earthathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Gasterosteus-williamsoni-Quaternary-LahontanFm-Nevada.jpg>

Hunt G.2010 Evolution in fossil lineages: paleontology and The Origin of Species. Am Nat.

Time series concepts

- Time series data are temporally autocorrelated
- We can study TS in their time or frequency domains (spectral analyses)
- Sometimes folks massage their data so it resembles white noise (WN) so it is easier to analyse (it's a bit like transforming your data so it "behaves well" for standard statistical models that assume that the data are normally distributed.
- What is WN? (a TS whose statistical properties like mean, variance and autocorrelation remain constant over time, staionary, looks the same anywhere you look)
- What is a RW (you often hear about this in paleobiology)? Is that WN?
- RW is $X(\text{at time } t) = X(\text{at time } t-1) + \text{white noise (at } t\text{)}$



https://www.sharetechnote.com/html/RF_Handbook_TimeDomain_FrequencyDomain.html

One major example

- Important historically in paleontology
- Important in time series tool development in both evolutionary biology (comparative phylogenetics) and paleontology

Eldredge and Gould 1972 Punctuated equilibria: an alternative to phyletic gradualism in *Models in Paleobiology*.

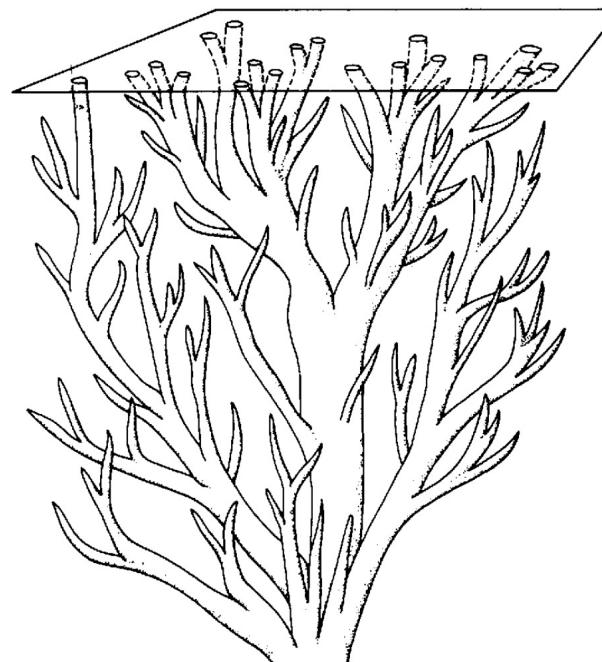
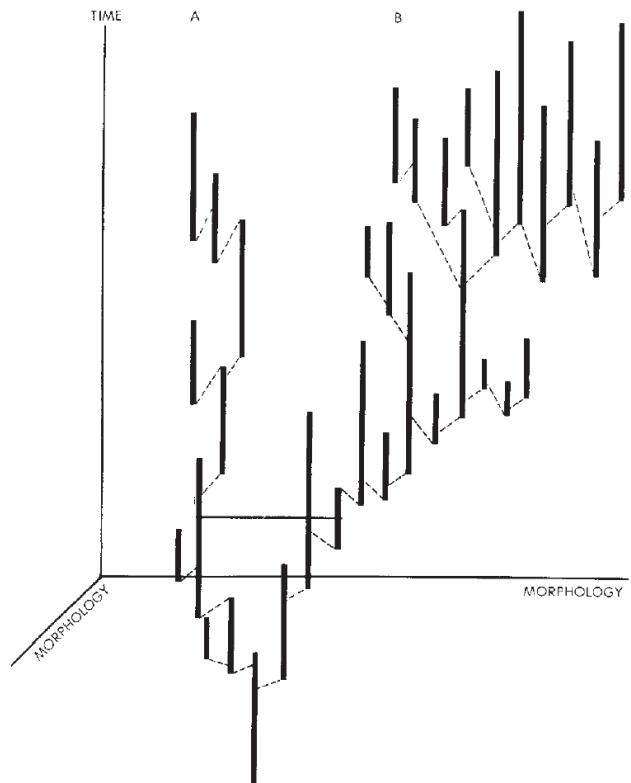
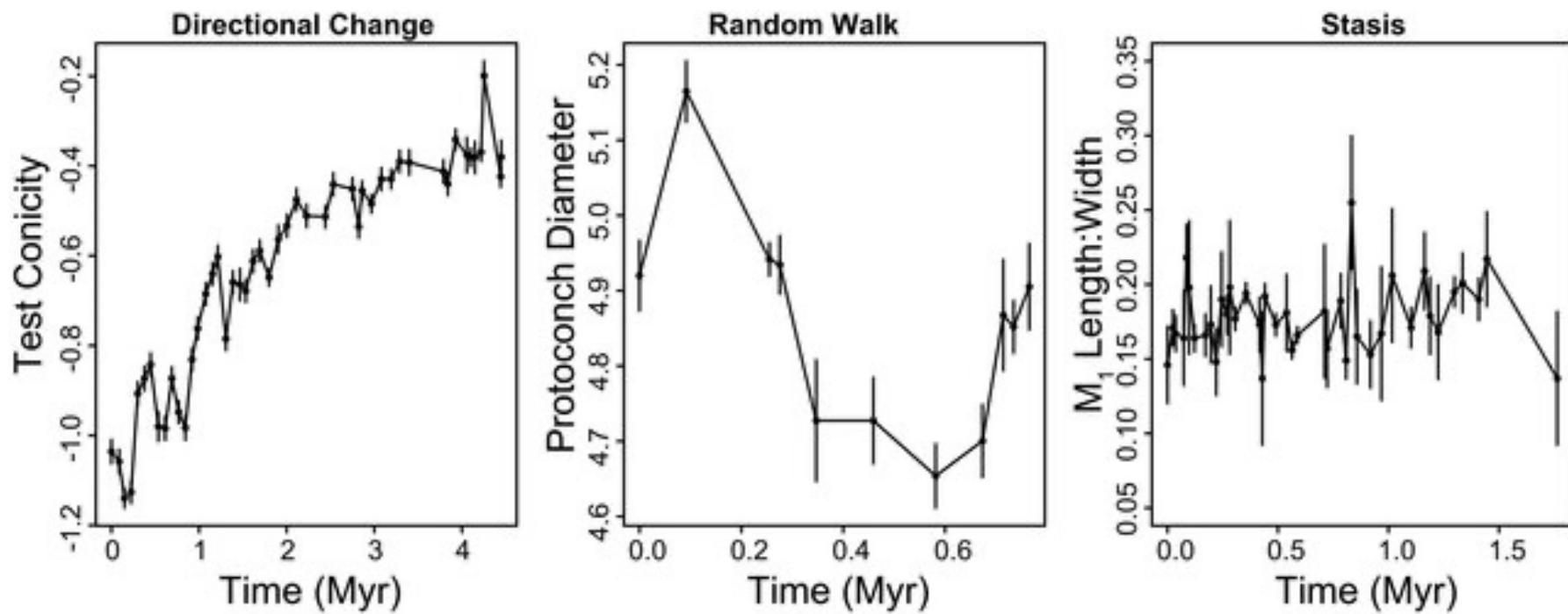


Figure 5-9: The “Tree of Life” viewed from the perspective of phyletic gradualism. Branches diverge gradually one from the other. A slow and relatively equal rate of evolution pervades the system. From Weller, 1969; figure 637.

Punc equilibrium : canonical phenotypic models



Hunt 2010. Evolution in fossil lineages: paleontology and the origin of species. *The American Naturalist* 176:S61–S76.

R package **PaleoTS**

Hunt 2008 Gradual or pulsed evolution: when should punctuational explanations be preferred? **Paleobiology** 34:60-377

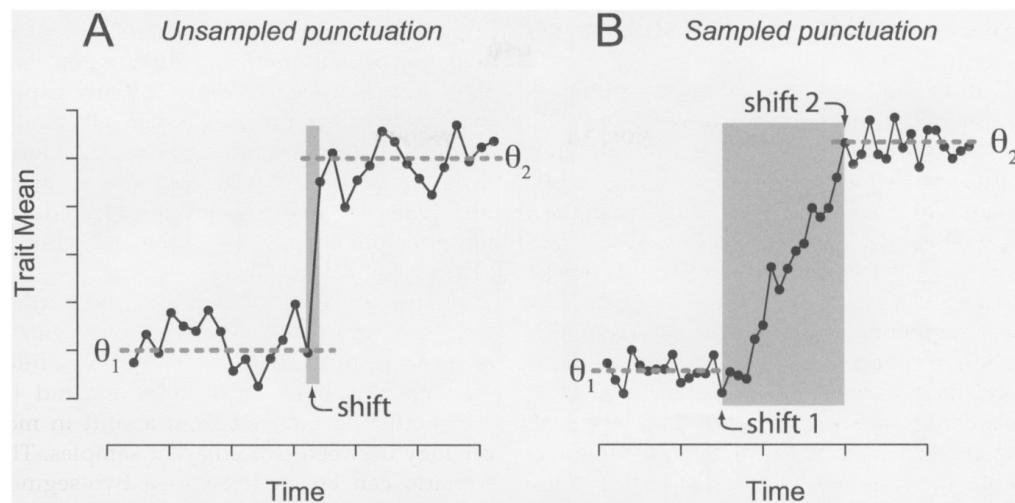
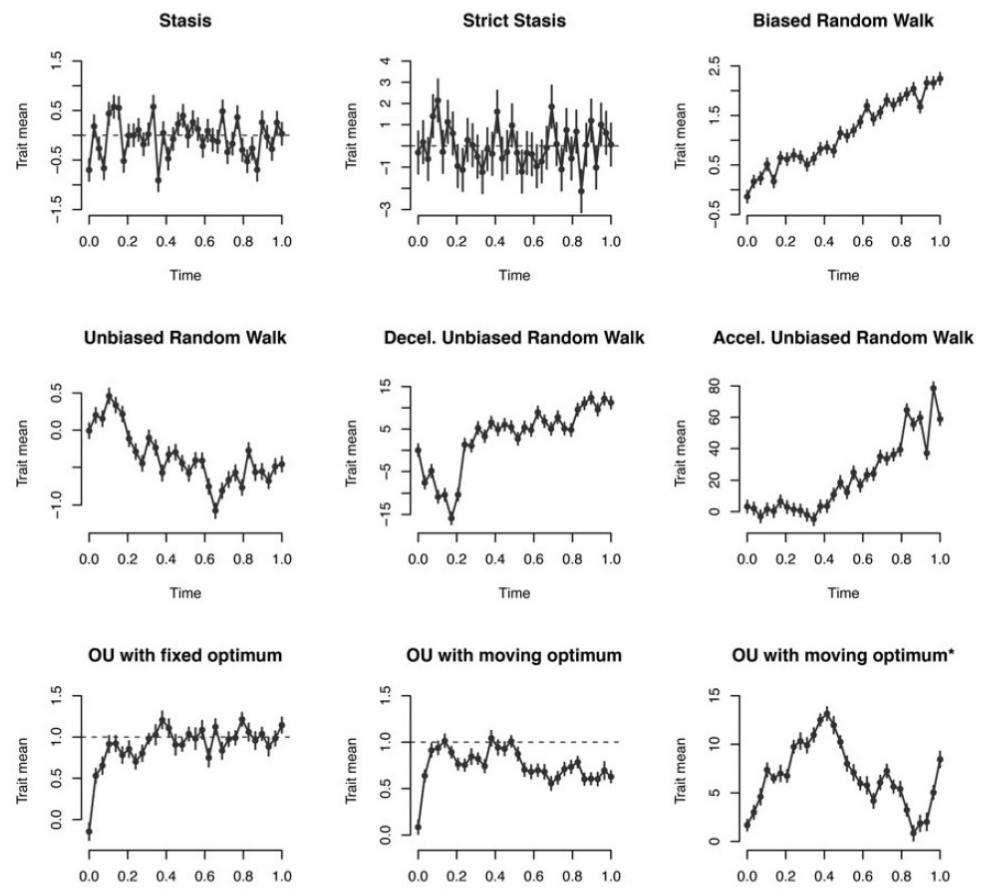


FIGURE 1. Illustrations of two kinds of punctuated change: unsampled punctuations (A), in which few or no intermediate populations are captured; and sampled punctuations (B), in which multiple populations from the transition interval are observed. Unsampled punctuations can be modeled effectively as two intervals of stasis with different optima (θ_1 and θ_2); the magnitude of punctuated change is determined by the difference in the two optimal values. For sampled punctuations, the interval of directional change is modeled explicitly as a general random walk inserted between two periods of stasis.

More models (evoTS)



Voje, K. L. 2023. Fitting and evaluating univariate and multivariate models of within-lineage evolution.
Paleobiology 49:747–764.

Objectives of time series analyses

- **DESCRIPTION**

- Temporal trend?
- Peak at some point?
- Repeated patterns?
- Tipping points, break points

- **EVALUATION & EXPLANATION**

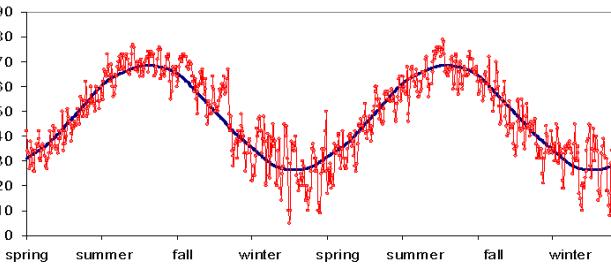
- Impact of a certain event (Before and After)
- "Drivers" of processes.

- **FORECASTING**

- Prediction of the future values of a process

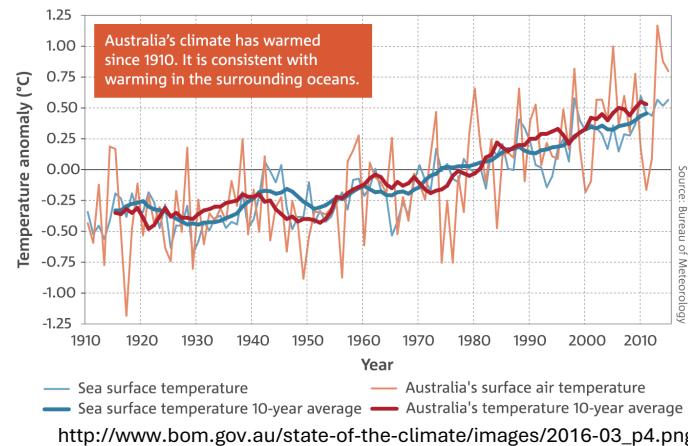
- Study one time series by itself

- Patterns
- Structure
- Parameters



https://training.weather.gov/pds/climate/pcu2/statistics/Stats/part1/CTS_PFtmin.png

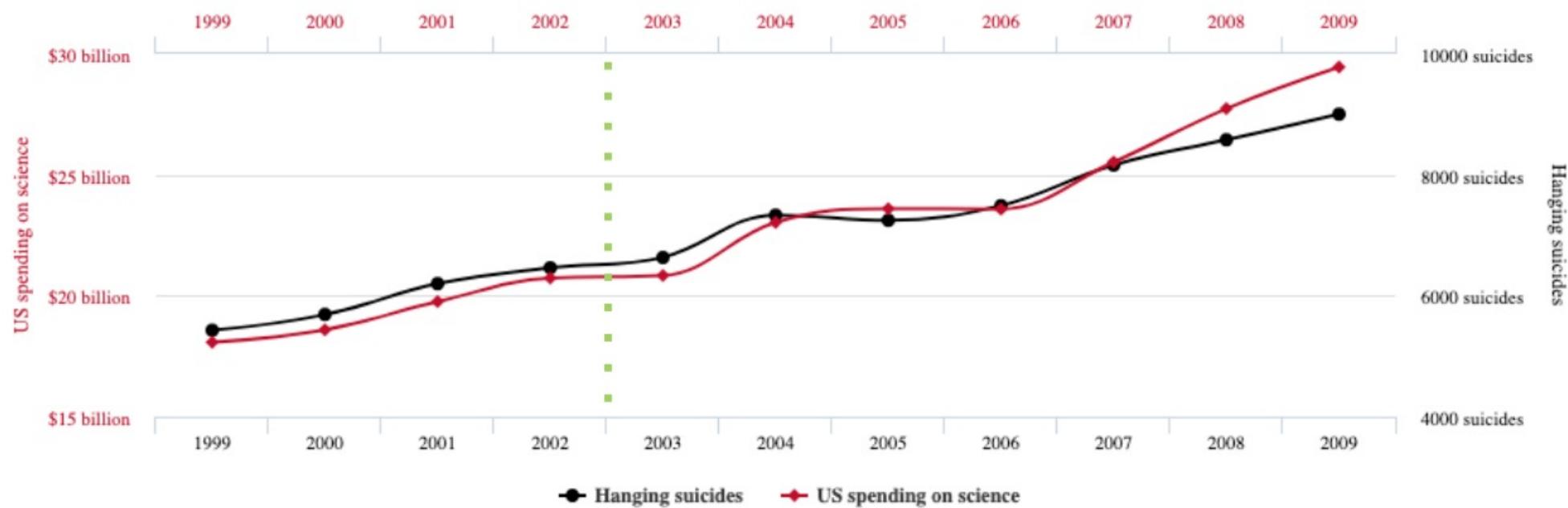
- Relationship(s) between 2 or more time series



US spending on science, space, and technology



Suicides by hanging, strangulation and suffocation

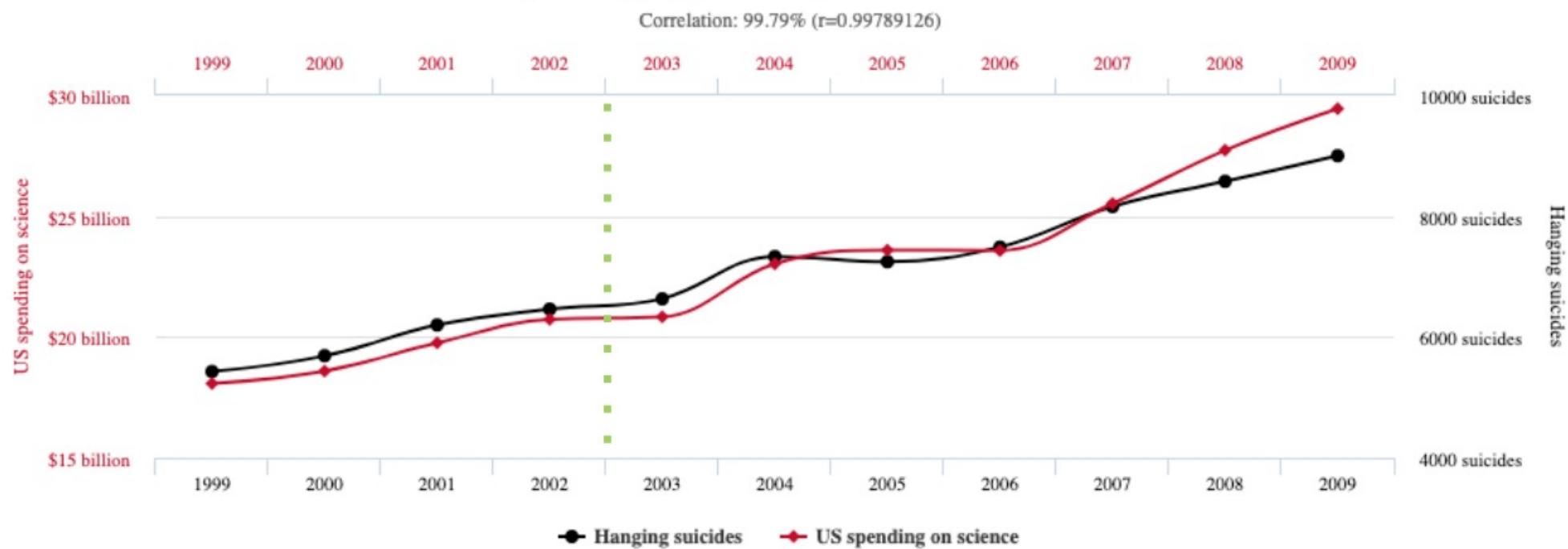


Data sources: U.S. Office of Management and Budget and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

tylervigen.com



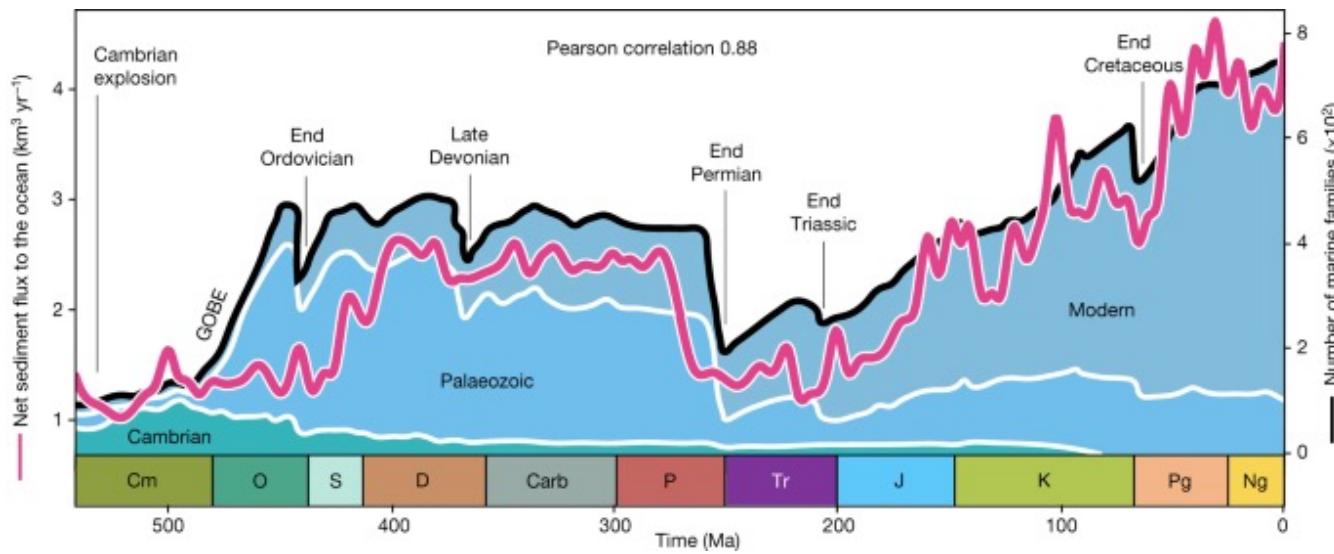
US spending on science, space, and technology correlates with Suicides by hanging, strangulation and suffocation



Data sources: U.S. Office of Management and Budget and Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

<https://www.michaeldiamond.com/beware-spurious-correlations/>

tylervigen.com

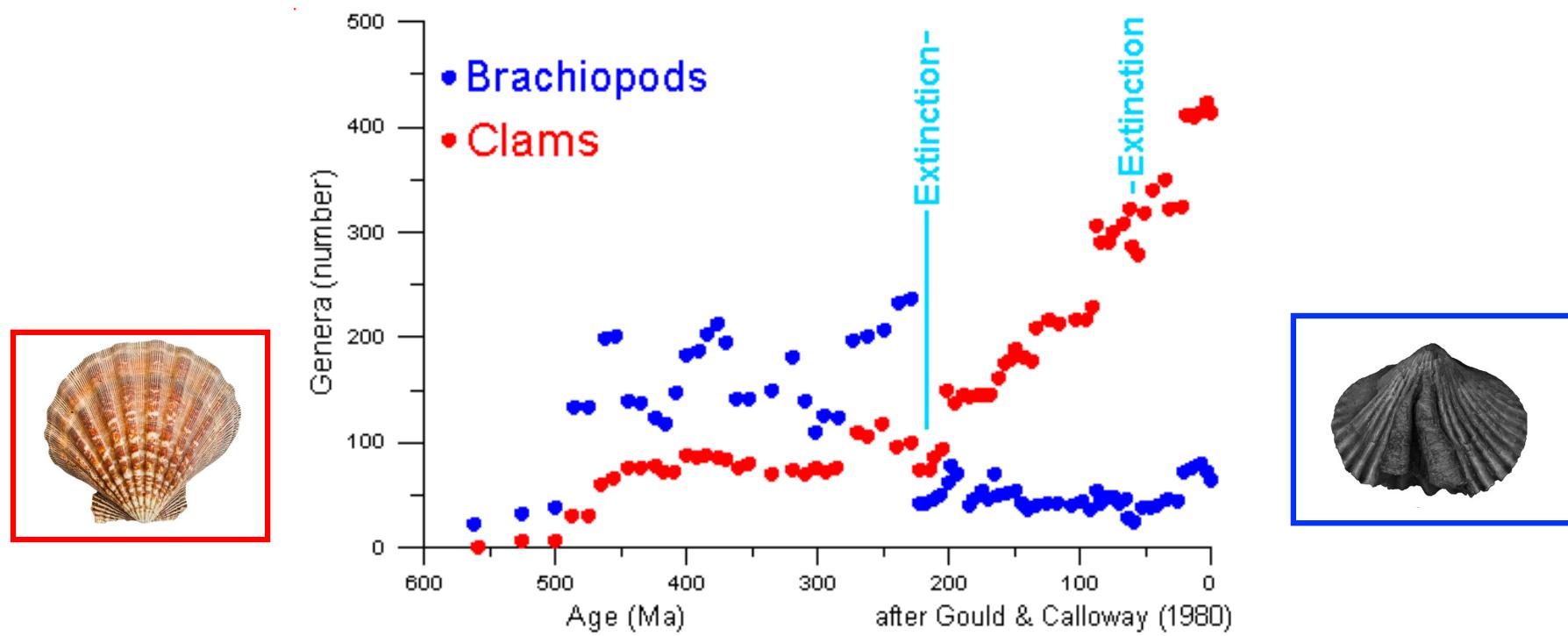


Salles et al. 2023 Landscape dynamics and the Phanerozoic diversification of the biosphere Nature 624: 115–121

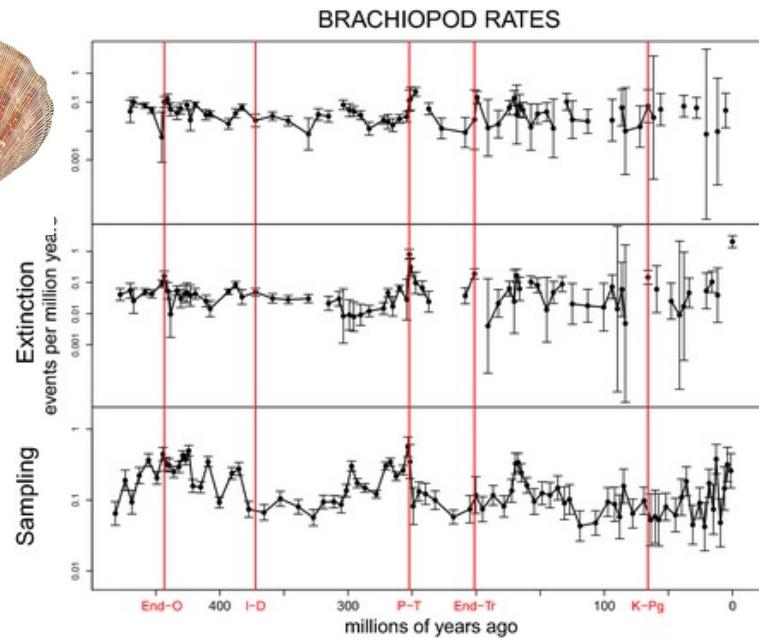
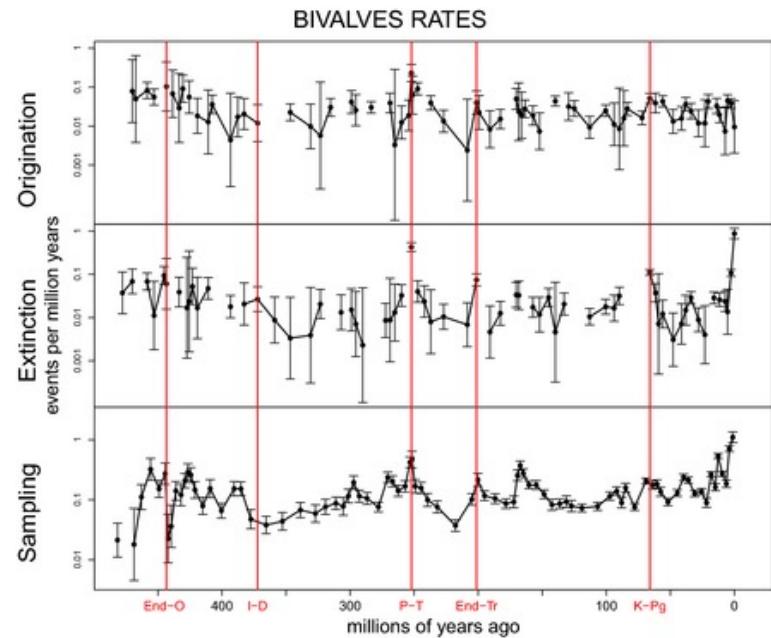
“The reconstructed net sediment flux to the ocean and the total number of marine families are strongly correlated (Pearson coefficient 0.88) and sediment flux variation markedly matches the three main phases that span the Phanerozoic eon (Fig. 3 and Extended Data Fig. 10a). This suggests that nutrient availability is a prime control on marine diversity.”

Gould & Calloway 1980 Clams and Brachiopods-Ships That Pass in the Night. Paleobiology

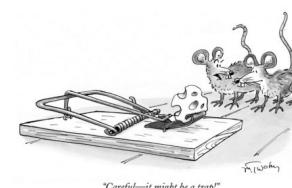
“The supposed replacement of brachiopods by clams is not gradual and sequential. It is a product of one event: the Permian extinction (which affected brachiopods profoundly and clams relatively little).”



<https://www.geo.arizona.edu/Antevs/ecol438/clambrac.html>

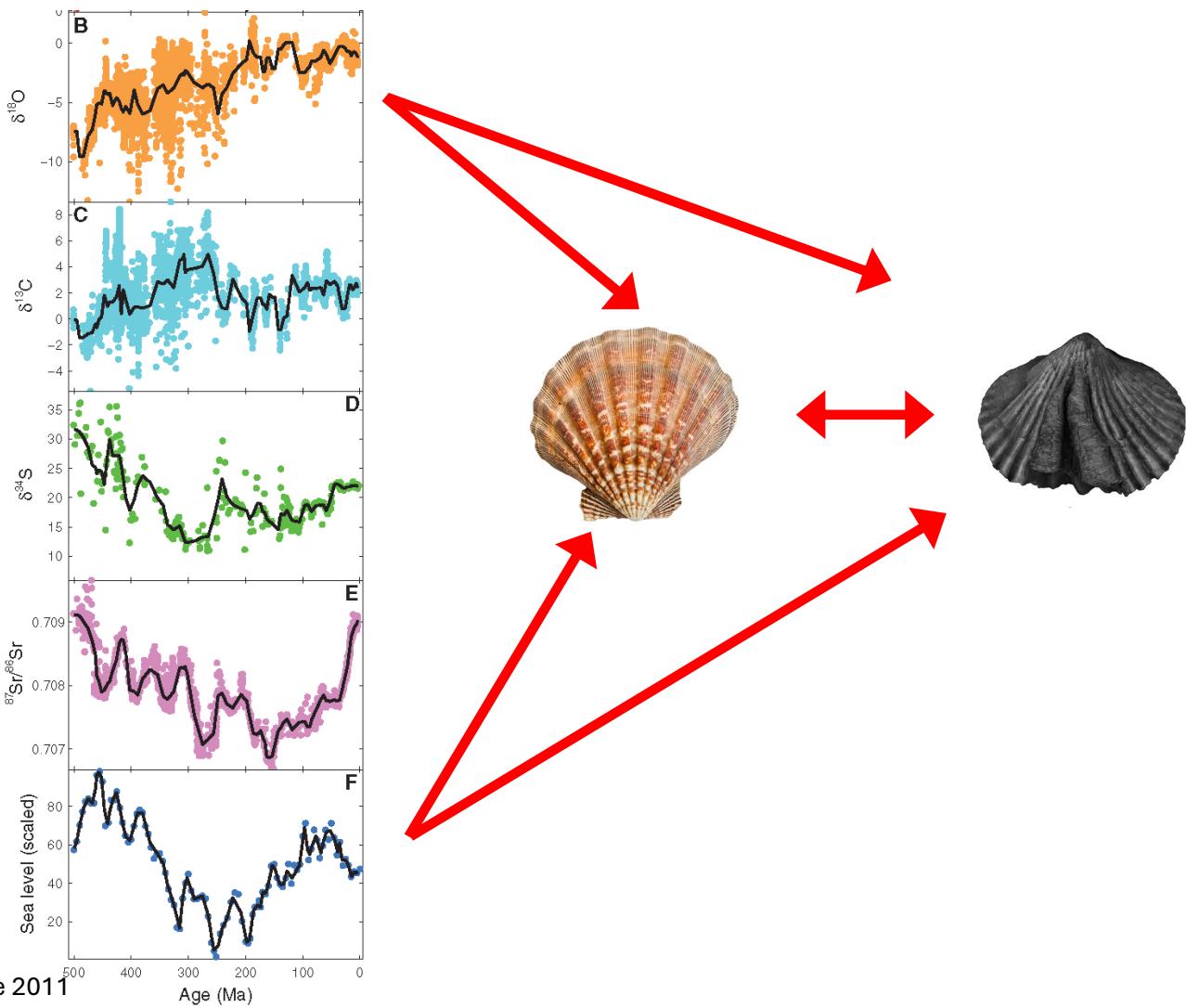


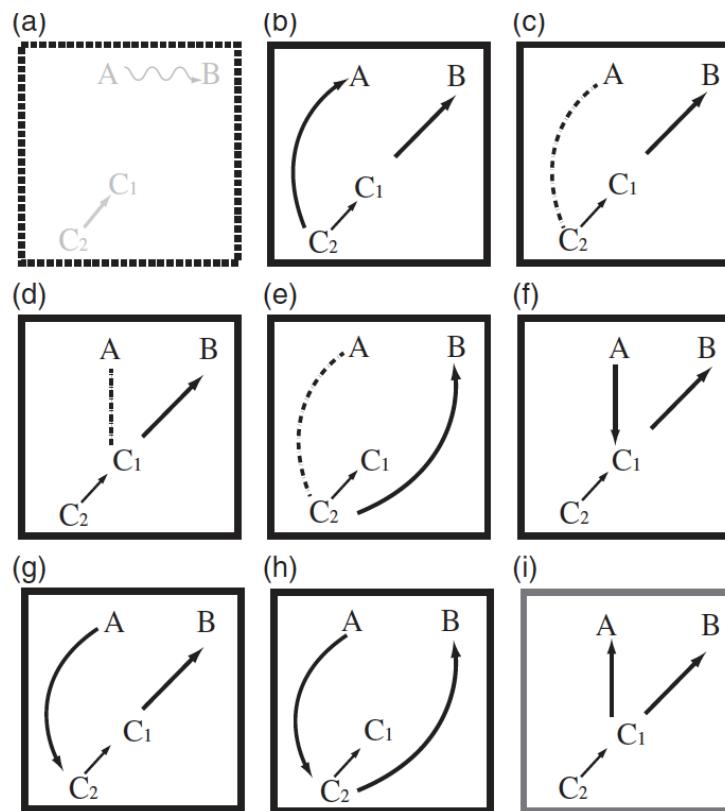
Liow, Reitan & Harnik 2015 Ecological interactions on macroevolutionary time scales:
clams and brachiopods are more than ships that pass in the night. Ecology Letters



Hypotheses

Data from Hannisdal and Peters Science 2011





Granger causality via linear Stochastic Differential Equations (SDEs)

Deterministic part

Stochastic
part

$$dX_1(t) = -\alpha_1(X_1(t) - \mu_1)dt + \sigma_1 dB_1(t)$$



Trond Reitan
University of Oslo, Norway



Tore Schweder
University of Oslo, Norway

Deterministic part

Stochastic
part

$$dX_1(t) = -\alpha_1(X_1(t) - \mu_1)dt + \sigma_1 dB_1(t)$$

X_2 is correlated with X_1

$$dX_2(t) = -\alpha_2(X_2(t) - \mu_2)dt + \sigma_2(1 - \rho^2)^{0.5}dB_2(t) + \rho \sigma_2 dB_1(t)$$

Deterministic part

Stochastic
part

$$dX_1(t) = -\alpha_1(X_1(t) - \mu_1)dt + \sigma_1 dB_1(t)$$

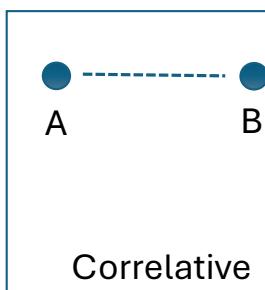
X_2 is correlated with X_1

$$dX_2(t) = -\alpha_2(X_2(t) - \mu_2)dt + \sigma_2(1 - \rho^2)^{0.5}dB_2(t) + \rho\sigma_2 dB_1(t)$$

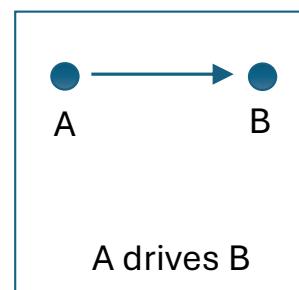
X_2 is driven by X_1

$$dX_2(t) = -\alpha_2(X_2(t) - \mu_2 - \beta[X_1(t) - \mu_1])dt + \sigma_2 dB_2(t)dt$$

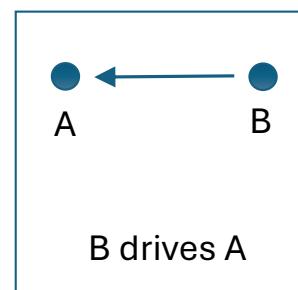
Link models that can be built using linear SDEs



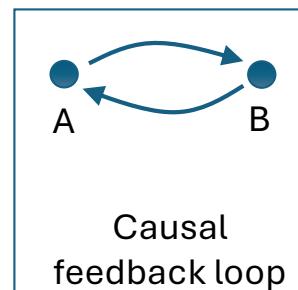
Correlative



A drives B

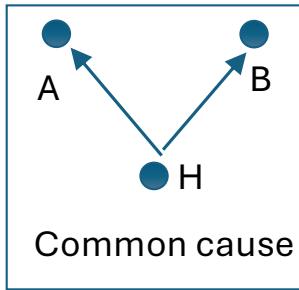


B drives A

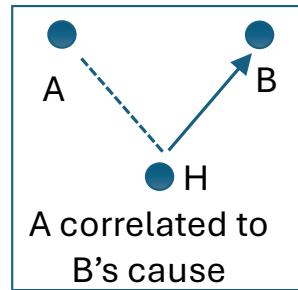


Causal
feedback loop

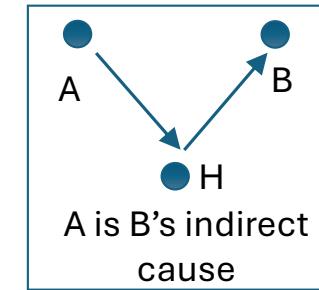
With a hidden layer, more link models can be made



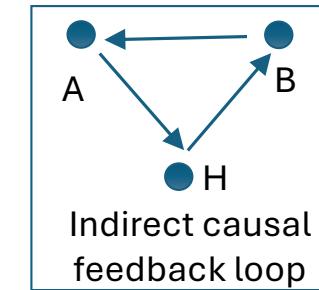
Common cause



A correlated to
B's cause



A is B's indirect
cause

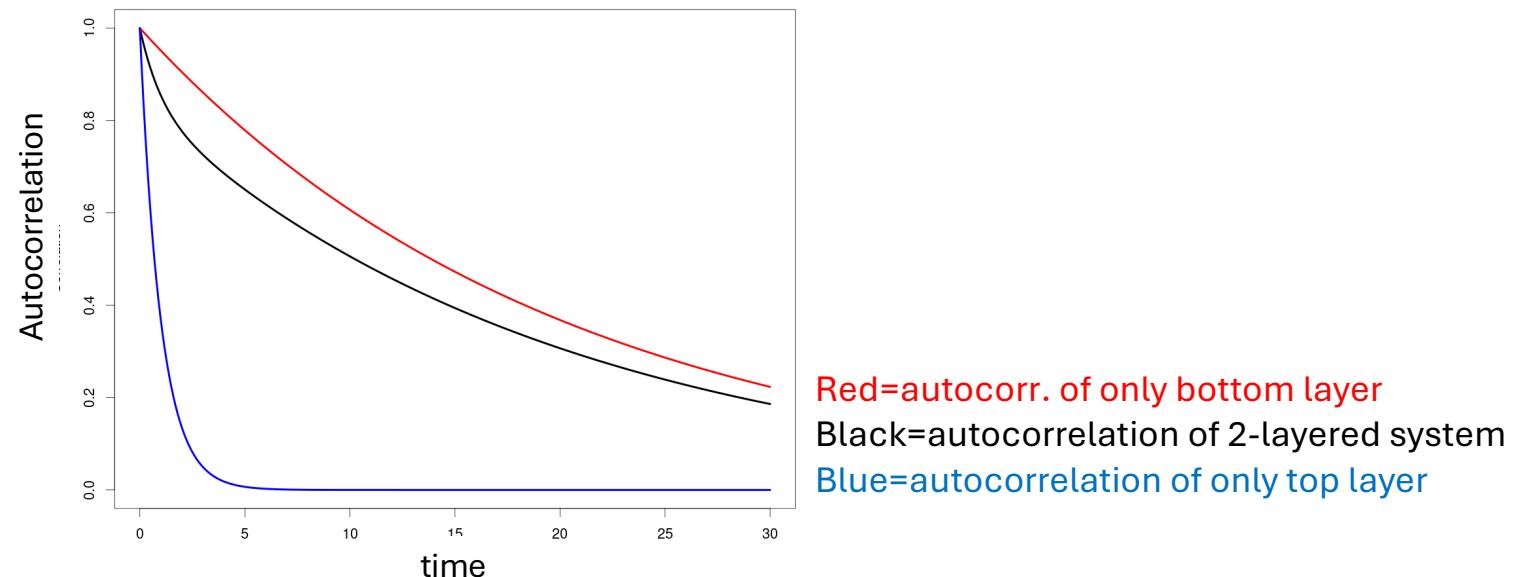


Indirect causal
feedback loop

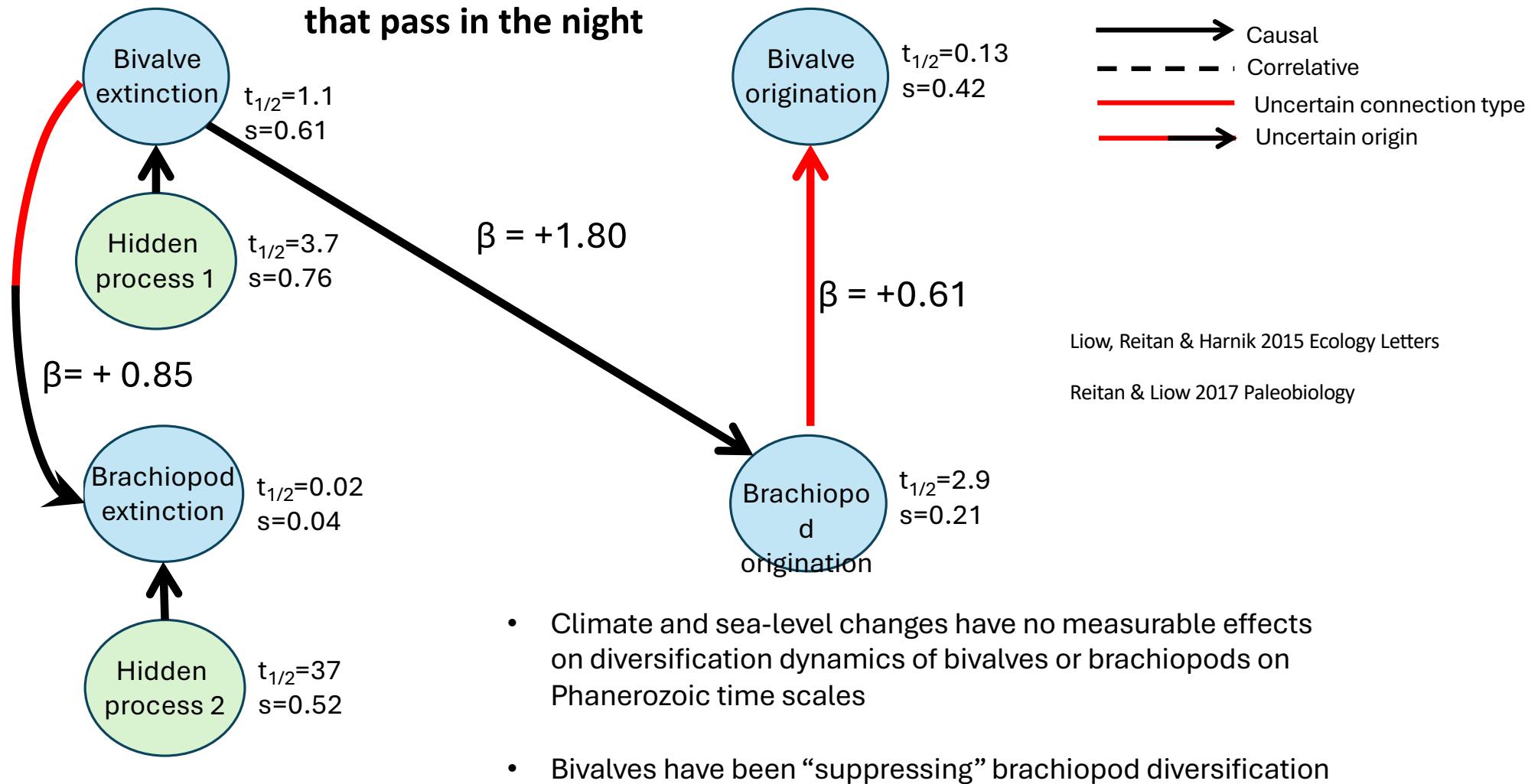
etc!

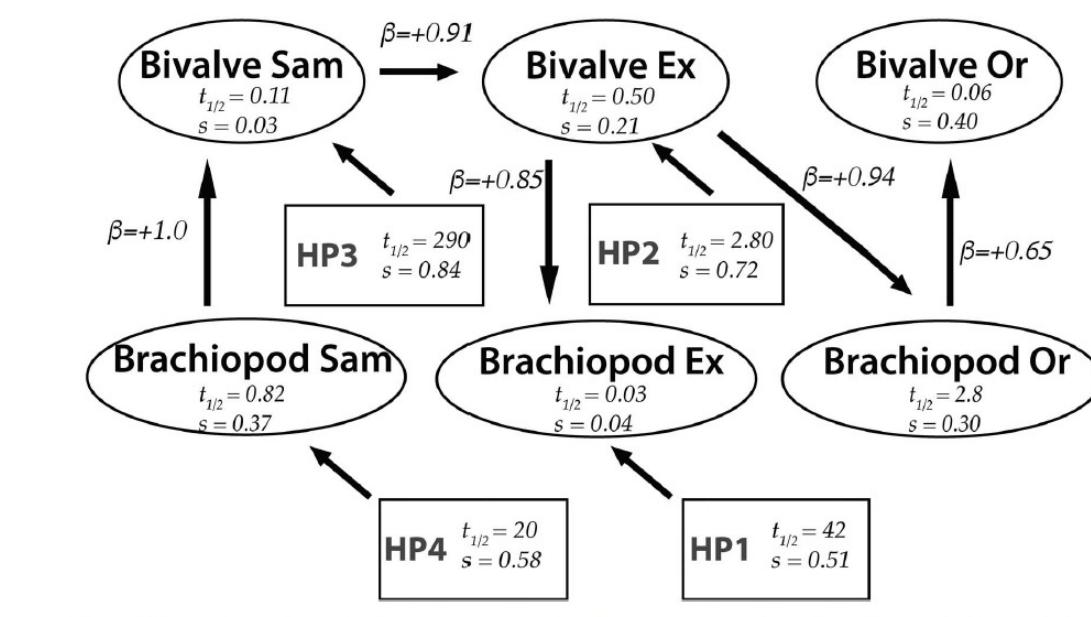
Hidden layers – not black magic

The hidden (bottom) layer can be found by its imprint on the observed (top) layer.

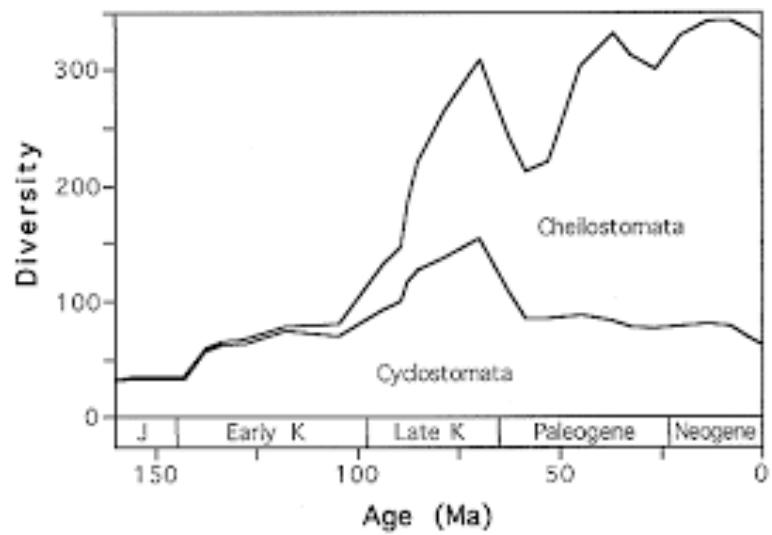


Clams and brachiopods are more than ships that pass in the night

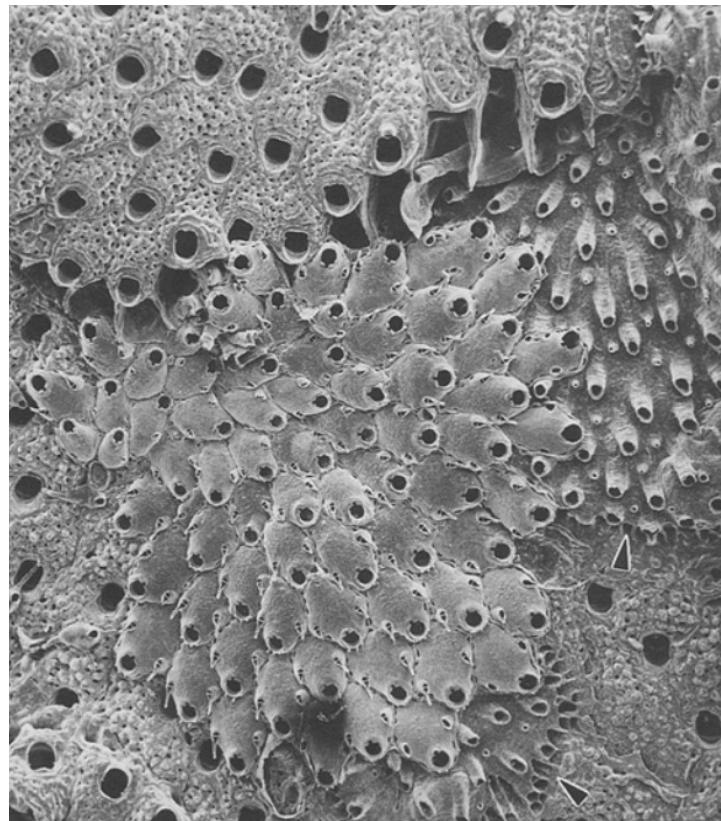


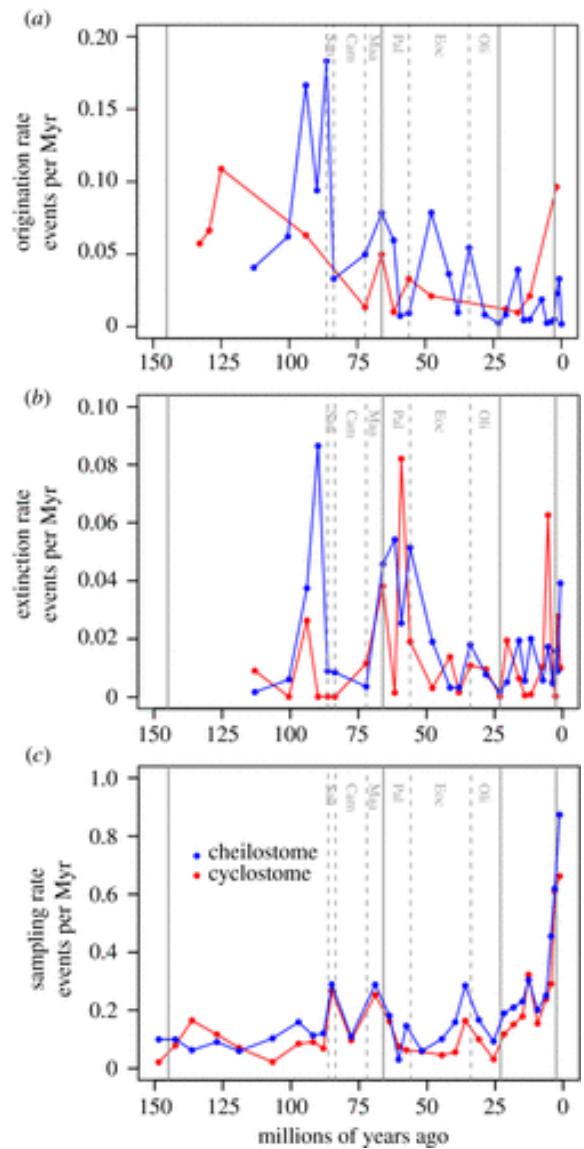


Reitan, T. and Liow, L.H. (2017) An unknown Phanerozoic driver of brachiopod extinction rates unveiled by multivariate linear stochastic differential equations. *Paleobiology* DOI:
 10.1017/pab.2017.11



Sepkoski, McKinney & Lidgard. 2000. Competitive displacement among post-Paleozoic cyclostome and cheilostome bryozoans. *Paleobiology* 26:7–18.





Lidgard, Di Martino, Zágoršek & Liow 2021 When fossil clades 'compete': local dominance, global diversification dynamics and causation. *Proc Biol Sci.*

Cheilostomes and cyclostomes are also more than ships that pass in the night

models	time series				
	1. cheil orig	1. cheil ext	1. cheil orig	1. cheil ext	
	2. cycl orig	2. cycl ext	2. cycl ext	2. cycl orig	
A. no relationship between time series	41.8	11.4	49.2		24.1
B. 1st time-series drives 2nd	10.5	22.9	11.4		9.8
C. 2nd time-series drives 1st	20.4	13.4	14.5		24.4
D. temporal feedback between time series	17.9	44.0	14.6		31.2
E. correlation between time series	9.4	8.3	10.2		10.5
proportion					
	1. cheil orig	1. cheil ext	1. cycl orig	1. cycl ext	
	2. proportion	2. proportion	2. proportion	2. proportion	
A. no relationship between time series	34.9	73	44.4		38.2
B. 1st time-series drives 2nd	18.5	11.8	14.4		12.1
C. 2nd time-series drives 1st	14.7	10.6	15		16.9
D. temporal feedback between time series	25.2	0	18.4		24.9
E. correlation between time series	6.6	4.6	7.8		7.9

Cheilostomes and cyclostomes are also more than ships that pass in the night

models	time series			
	1. cheil orig 2. cycl orig	1. cheil ext 2. cycl ext	1. cheil orig 2. cycl ext	1. cheil ext 2. cycl orig
A. no relationship between time series	41.8	11.4	49.2	24.1
B. 1st time-series drives 2nd	10.5	22.9	11.4	9.8
C. 2nd time-series drives 1st	20.4	13.4	14.5	24.4
D. temporal feedback between time series	17.9	44.0	14.6	31.2
E. correlation between time series	9.4	8.3	10.2	10.5

Model D	Mean	Median	Lower 5%	Upper 95%
$\mu.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	-2.126	-2.088	-3.641	-0.605
$t_{1/2}.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	30.3445	14.1167	0.719	136.945
$\sigma.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	0.288	0.294	0.002	0.623
$\mu.\text{cyclostome}.\text{extinction}$	-2.459	-2.527	-3.728	-0.939
$t_{1/2}.\text{cyclostome}.\text{extinction}$	13.710	3.474	0.460	77.983
$\sigma.\text{cyclostome}.\text{extinction}$	0.195	0.152	0.002	0.6467
$\beta.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}.\text{to}.\text{cyclostome}.\text{extinction}$	0.522	0.572	-0.345	1.212
$\beta.\text{cyclostome}.\text{extinction}.\text{to}.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	0.326	0.442	-1.017	1.315

Model B

Cheilostomes and cyclostomes are also more than ships that pass in the night

models	time series			
	1. cheil orig 2. cycl orig	1. cheil ext 2. cycl ext	1. cheil orig 2. cycl ext	1. cheil ext 2. cycl orig
A. no relationship between time series	41.8	11.4	49.2	24.1
B. 1st time-series drives 2nd	10.5	22.9	11.4	9.8
C. 2nd time-series drives 1st	20.4	13.4	14.5	24.4
D. temporal feedback between time series	17.9	44.0	14.6	31.2
E. correlation between time series	9.4	8.3	10.2	10.5

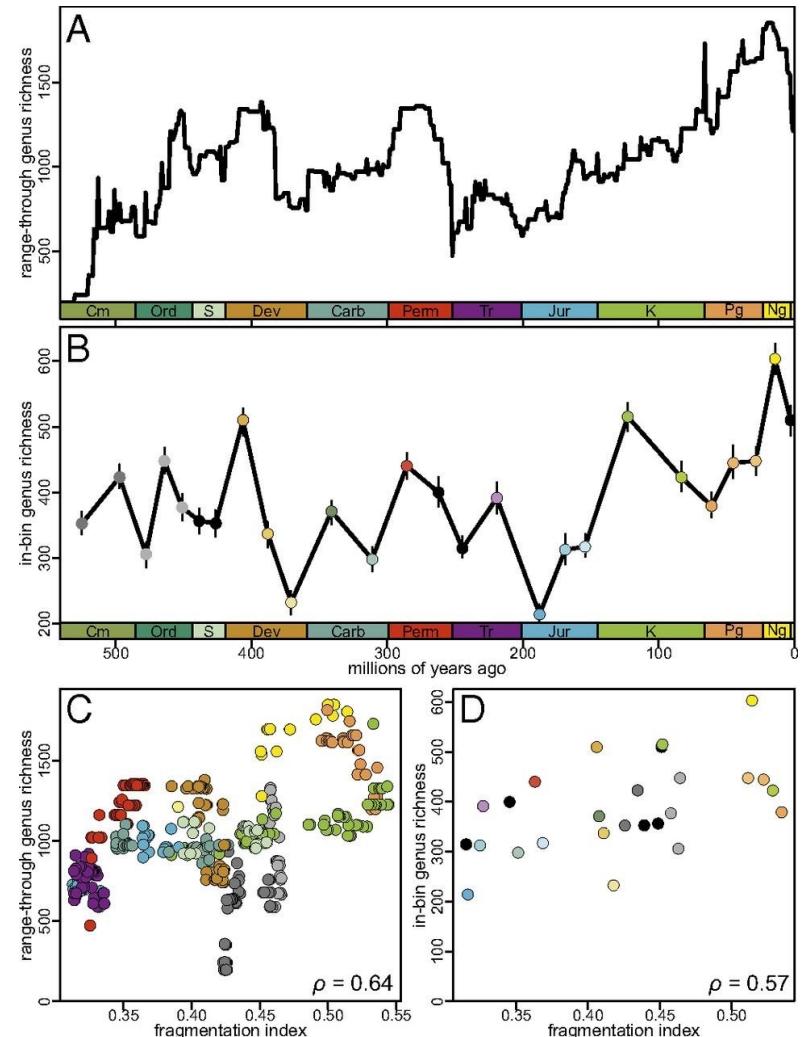
Model D	Mean	Median	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
$\mu.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	2.482	-2.493	-3.795	-1.070
$t_{1/2}.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	14.67	4	6.600	0.641
$\sigma.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}$	0.197	0.168	0.002	0.577
$\mu.\text{cyclostome}.\text{origination}$	2.026	-2.036	-3.268	-0.472
$t_{1/2}.\text{cyclostome}.\text{origination}$	29.31	9	18.183	0.709
$\sigma.\text{cyclostome}.\text{origination}$	0.275	0.252	0.009	0.658
$\beta.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinction}.\text{to}.\text{cyclostome}.\text{origina}t$	0.275	0.303	-0.915	1.185
$\beta.\text{cyclostome}.\text{origination}.\text{to}.\text{cheilostome}.\text{extinc}t$	0.563	0.637	-0.773	1.314

Do tectonics regulate marine diversity at Phanerozoic time scales?



Connor Wilson
(Post bac Fulbright in Oslo, now U of Arizona
grad student)

Zaffos et al. 2017. Plate tectonic regulation of global marine animal diversity. PNAS

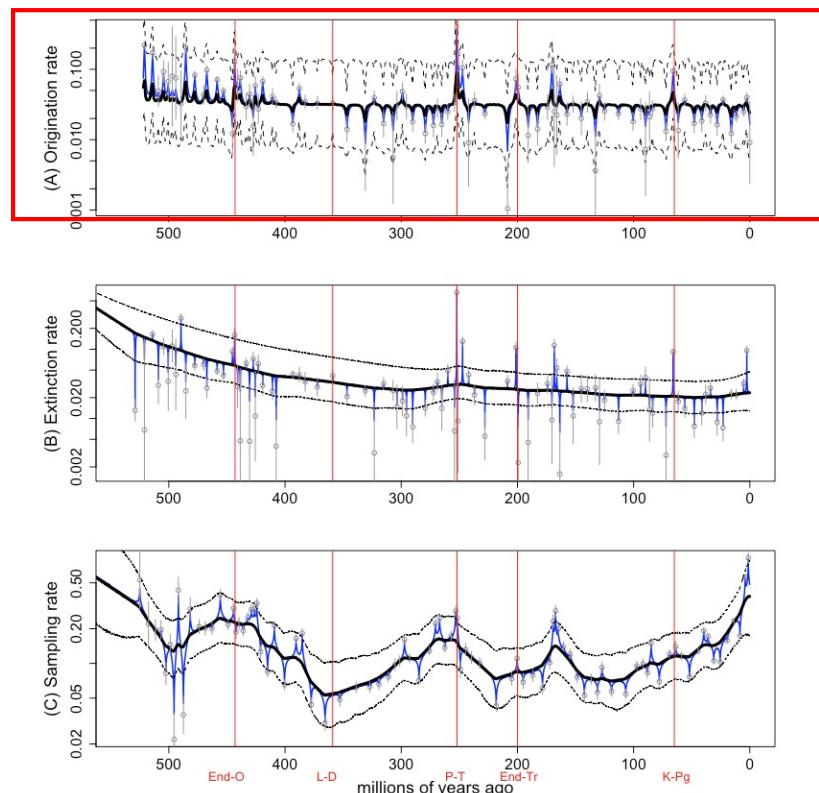
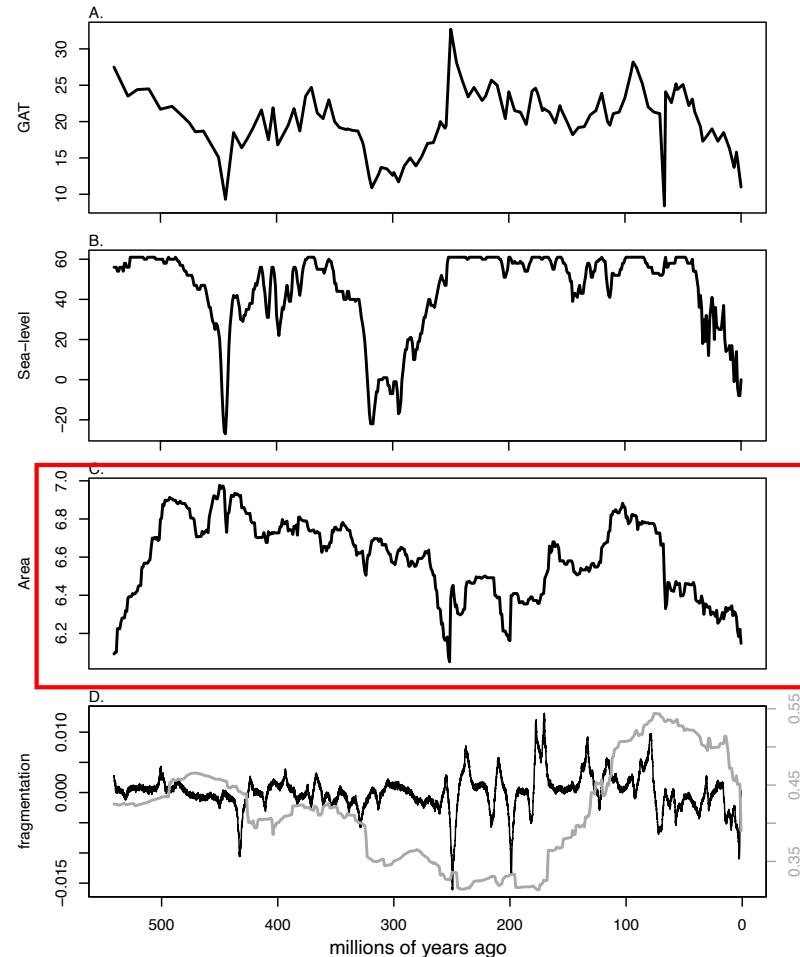


Other causal, and “causal” inference approaches

- First differencing
- Break point analyses, spectral analyses
- Structural equation modelling and path analyses
- Information Transfer
- Convergent cross mapping (CCM)
- Etc. see e.g. Runge, J., Gerhardus, A., Varando, G. et al. Causal inference for time series. Nat Rev Earth Environ 4, 487–505 (2023).
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.uio.no/10.1038/s43017-023-00431-y>

Do tectonics regulate marine diversity at Phanerozoic time scales? - Nope

Wilson et al. 2024 unveiling the underlying drivers of Phanerozoic marine diversification (Proc B Roy Soc)



layeranalyzer: Inferring correlative and causal connections from time series data in R

Trond Reitan^{1,2}  | Lee Hsiang Liow^{1,2} 

¹Department of Biosciences, Centre for Ecological and Evolutionary Synthesis, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

²Natural History Museum, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

Correspondence

Trond Reitan

Email: trond.reitan@ibv.uio.no

Funding information

H2020 European Research Council, Grant/Award Number: 724324; Norges Forskningsråd, Grant/Award Number: 235073/F20

Handling Editor: Samantha Price

Abstract

1. Distinguishing correlative and causal connections among time series is an important challenge in evolutionary biology, ecology, macroevolution and palaeobiology.
2. Here, we present `layeranalyzer`, an R package that uses linear stochastic differential equations as a tool for parametrically describing evolutionary and ecological processes and for modelling temporal correlation and Granger causality between two or more time series.
3. We describe the basic functions in `layeranalyzer` and briefly discuss modelling strategies by demonstrating our tool with three disparate case studies. First, we model a single time series of phenotypic evolution in a bird species; second, we extract cyclical connections in the well-known hare-lynx dataset; third, we infer

Take home:

Remember: Software are “blind”!!!

**And numbers with no units attached
cannot usually be interpreted!**