

## Correction

### ENGINEERING, NEUROSCIENCE

Correction for “Data-driven body–machine interface for the accurate control of drones,” by Jenifer Miehlebradt, Alexandre Cherpillod, Stefano Mintchev, Martina Coscia, Fiorenzo Artoni, Dario Floreano, and Silvestro Micera, which was first published July 16, 2018; 10.1073/pnas.1718648115 (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* **115**, 7913–7918).

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# Data-driven body–machine interface for the accurate control of drones

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**The accurate teleoperation of robotic devices requires simple, yet intuitive and reliable control interfaces. However, current human–machine interfaces (HMI) often fail to fulfill these characteristics, leading to systems requiring an intensive practice to reach a sufficient operation expertise. Here, we present a systematic methodology to identify the spontaneous gesture-based interaction strategies of naive individuals with a distant device, and to exploit this information to develop a data-driven body–machine interface (BoMI) to efficiently control this device. We applied this approach to the specific case of drone steering and derived a simple control method relying on upper-body motion. The identified BoMI allowed participants with no prior experience to rapidly master the control of both simulated and real drones, outperforming joystick users, and comparing with the control ability reached by participants using the bird-like flight simulator Birdly.**

human–machine interface | body–machine interface |  
immersive drone control | teleoperation | motor control

**T**eleoperation, a subfield of human–machine interaction (HMI), describes the control at a distance of an actuated device (1). Typical applications include deployments in environments where it is not desirable or possible to send a human operator, such as nuclear plants (2, 3), scenes of natural hazards, or more generally in search and rescue missions (4–6). The use of teleoperated systems can augment human dexterity and precision, which are fundamental abilities in those and other fields of application, such as minimally invasive surgery (7) or micro-fabrication (8). Patients suffering from neurological disorders may benefit as well from teleoperated systems to substitute for lost body functions by controlling wheelchairs (9, 10), telepresence systems (11, 12), or robotic manipulators (13).

Successful teleoperation requires robust and reliable control interfaces. A well-defined interaction should be transparent (14, 15), rely on intuitive command inputs to ensure rapid proficiency and minimize the task-associated workload (16), and provide appropriate feedback (visual, auditory, haptic) to strengthen the awareness of the operator (17). A number of existing interfaces already allow interactions with robotic devices. However, simple third-party devices such as a joystick show limited performance even with systems with few degrees of freedom (DOFs). The development of intuitive commands becomes yet more challenging in “nonhomologous” interactions, that is, when the operators’ command behaviors significantly differ from the machine’s realizable behavior, or when their physical abilities are restricted.

A possible approach to address this issue comes from brain–computer interfaces (BCIs), which bypass behavioral output by directly retrieving the desired information from the cerebral activity patterns, often relying on mental imagery. Successful examples include the control of humanoids (18), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (19–21), wheelchairs, and telepresence systems for motion-impaired individuals (9–12). BCIs do nonetheless come with certain limitations, which may prevent their

widespread utilization. Firstly, the noninvasive signal acquisition is associated with a low signal-to-noise ratio and thus a high sensitivity to perturbations. The use of these systems is therefore limited to relatively controlled environments and may not be suited to everyday activities. Another limitation of this approach comes from the execution of motor imagery tasks, which strongly constrains the user’s focus on the completion of the control task. The system is therefore prone to errors in case of unpredicted and undesired stimuli and a long-term operation is likely to be cognitively demanding.

Recent and promising developments suggest that body–machine interfaces (BoMIs) are a valuable alternative to BCIs for able-bodied or partially impaired persons. Instead of neural activity patterns, these systems retrieve information from body motion or from the underlying muscular activities (22). The broad spectrum of applications ranges from the control of assistive devices by neurological patients (23–25) to the control of UAVs (26–29). BoMIs present one unambiguous advantage over BCIs: they exploit the fine control the operators can have over their body, while operating a BCI requires to actively modulate the activity of designed cerebral areas, a task for which

## Significance

**The teleoperation of nonhumanoid robots is often a demanding task, as most current control interfaces rely on mappings between the operator’s and the robot’s actions, which are determined by the design and characteristics of the interface, and may therefore be challenging to master. Here, we describe a structured methodology to identify common patterns in spontaneous interaction behaviors, to implement embodied user interfaces, and to select the appropriate sensor type and positioning. Using this method, we developed an intuitive, gesture-based control interface for real and simulated drones, which outperformed a standard joystick in terms of learning time and steering abilities. Implementing this procedure to identify body-machine patterns for specific applications could support the development of more intuitive and effective interfaces.**

Author contributions: J.M., A.C., S. Mintchev, M.C., D.F., and S. Micera designed research; J.M., A.C., and S. Mintchev performed research; J.M., A.C., M.C., and F.A. analyzed data; A.C. developed the flight simulators, the drone, and their control interfaces; and J.M. and S. Micera wrote the paper.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data deposition: The data that support the findings of this study can be accessed on GitHub at [https://github.com/jmlbr/body-machine\\_interface\\_drone](https://github.com/jmlbr/body-machine_interface_drone).

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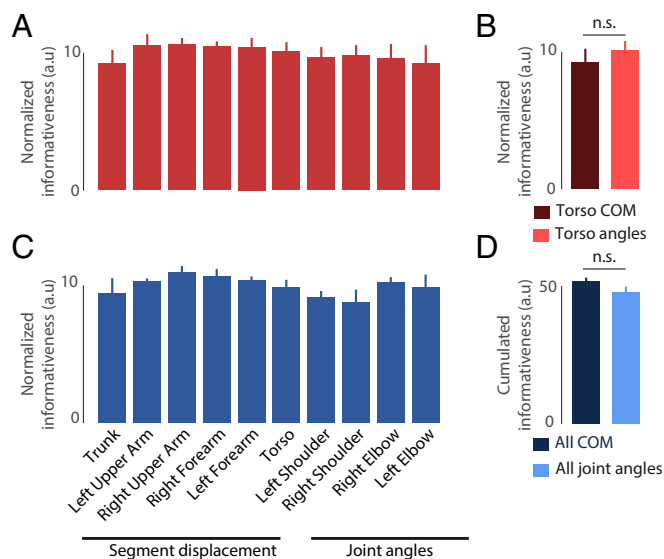
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**Fig. 4.** Information levels held by the upper-body segments in terms of three-dimensional position or joint angles. (A and B) Participants using only the torso. The three-dimensional displacement and the angles of the torso appear to hold equivalent levels of information. (C and D) Participants using the torso and the arms. The informativeness is equally shared between the positional and angular data of all segments and joints. The bar graphs represent the means + SD over 10 (Torso group) and 5 (Torso and Arms group) subjects.

The kinematics-based classification yielded outcomes comparable with the EMG-based decoders. The accuracy obtained for the Torso group was similar when using the full dataset ( $A_{\text{Torso\_allKin}} = 55.90 \pm 8.51\%$ ) and the selected variables ( $A_{\text{Torso\_selectedKin}} = 60.13 \pm 17.16\%$ ,  $P = 0.93$ ). Likewise, the decoding power for the Torso and Arms group was in the same range for the full dataset ( $A_{\text{TorsoArms\_allKin}} = 76.13 \pm 14.43\%$ ) and for the selected variables ( $A_{\text{TorsoArms\_selectedKin}} = 75.08 \pm 16.11\%$ ,  $P = 0.12$ ). The generalized classification led to lower, yet not significantly different accuracies, for the Torso group ( $A_{\text{Torso\_gen}} = 53.02 \pm 14.88\%$ ,  $P = 0.175$ ) and Torso and Arms group ( $A_{\text{TorsoArms\_gen}} = 40.69 \pm 8.78\%$ ,  $P = 0.021$ , not significant at the corrected Bonferroni level).

These results confirm the good decoding power of the selected datasets as we observed only minor changes in the decoding performance when the full sets of variables were reduced to the selected subsets, indicating that the retained factors carried the discriminant information. In general, we obtained higher decoding accuracies for the Torso and Arms group than for the Torso group. This reflects the higher intermovement variability displayed by the Torso and Arms group, due to the higher number of degrees of freedom.

Overall, the selected kinematic variables, i.e., the joint angles, yielded the best decoding ability. Therefore, we used the joint angles (torso angles for the Torso group; torso, shoulder, and elbow angles for the Torso and Arms group) as inputs for a closed-loop implementation.

**Experiment 2: BoMI Control of a Simulated Drone.** The subjects were shown a virtual environment displaying a series of waypoints to follow (Fig. 1B) through a HMD. The first 9 min of virtual flight were considered as a training period. The final performance was evaluated at the end of the training, on an additional series of waypoints (Movie S4; see also SI Appendix). We compared the outcomes of the gesture-based control to a previous study in which the participants used a standard joystick or Birdly, an immersive platform simulating a bird's flight (52). Additionally, we compared the evolution of the steering performance between the gesture-based controls and the joystick over

three training sessions on consecutive days on a subset of those subjects.

**Participants steering the aircraft using only their torso outperformed those using their torso and arms.** Over a single practice session, all participants displayed a continuous performance improvement. The final performance, evaluated at the end of the session, was significantly higher for the group using only the torso ( $\text{Perf}_{\text{Torso}} = 84.58 \pm 17.79\%$ ) than for the group using the Torso and Arms strategy ( $\text{Perf}_{\text{TorsoArms}} = 62.59 \pm 25.88\%$ ,  $P = 0.004$ ) or the joystick ( $\text{Perf}_{\text{Joystick}} = 59.42 \pm 31.35\%$ ,  $P = 0.029$ ). The performance of the Torso group was however comparable to the results obtained by the participants using Birdly ( $\text{Perf}_{\text{Birdly}} = 93.01 \pm 5.87$ ,  $P = 0.43$ ; Fig. 6A).

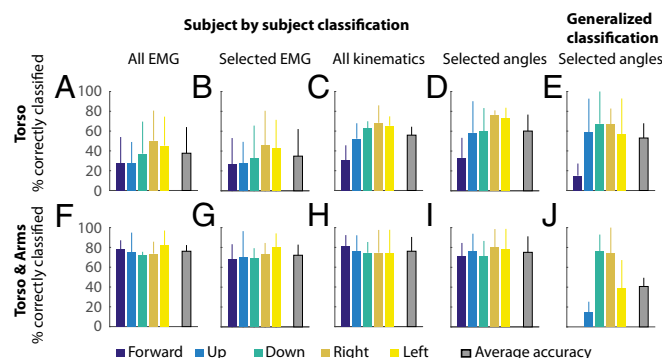
**Three-day training leads to a homogeneous performance for the torso strategy.** After three training sessions, the participants using only their torso showed lower variability in their final performances than those using the Torso and Arms strategy ( $F_{5,5} = 10.96$ ,  $P = 0.02$ ) and the joystick ( $F_{6,5} = 19.88$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ). This was observed even if, with this reduced number of participants, there were no differences in terms of performances across the three strategies ( $P = 0.25$ ).

**Experiment 3: BoMI Control of a Real Drone.** We evaluated the transferability of the skills acquired during the virtual reality (VR) training to the control of an actual drone using the Torso strategy, as this approach proved to be superior for the control of a virtual aircraft (SI Appendix, Fig. S1). The participants began with a 9-min VR training as described previously. Afterward, they were given the control of a real quadcopter with FPV video feedback, which they could freely fly for 2 min to get used to its dynamics. Eventually, they were asked to steer the drone through six gates arranged along an eight-shaped trajectory (Fig. 1C; see also SI Appendix).

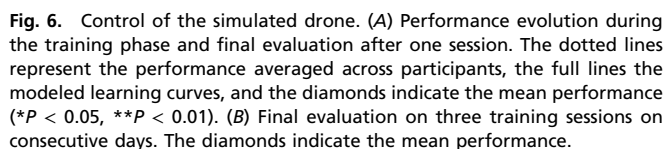
After completing the VR training and the free flight, the participants were able to steer the quadcopter along the defined path with an average percentage of validly crossed gates (PVC, 19) of  $87.67 \pm 9.88\%$  (Movie S5). This result suggests a transfer of the control skills acquired in simulation and confirms the usability of the Torso strategy for the steering of a real drone.

## Discussion

We proposed a systematic selection process to identify effective body movement patterns in nonhomologous HMIs and to reduce the sensor coverage necessary for the acquisition of the discriminant information. We applied the described method to the



**Fig. 5.** Classification accuracy as percentage of correctly classified samples. (A–D) Subject by subject and (E) generalized classification for the Torso group. (F–I) Subject by subject and (J) generalized classification for the Torso and Arms group. The selected EMG were STRCM, TRAP, LAT, DANT, DMED, and TRI for the Torso group and STRCM, TRAP, INFRA, LAT, RHO, PEC, DANT, DMED, TRI, and EXDC for the Torso and Arms group. The selected kinematic variables consisted of the (absolute) torso rotation angles for the Torso group and the torso, and bilateral shoulder and elbow angles for the Torso and Arms group. The bar graphs represent the means + SD over four (Torso group) and five (Torso and Arms group) subjects.



In a single session, the two implemented gestural strategies led to significantly different performance levels, with the participants using the Torso strategy outperforming those using the Torso and Arms approach (Fig. 64). This difference was expected, since the Torso and Arms strategy was derived from the movement patterns displayed by 5 out of 15 participants of Experiment 1, being therefore less representative of the population. Additionally,

Another limitation comes from the small diversity of our study population, which consisted mainly of young, male university students. It is unknown to which extent experience and observation shape the human representation of noninnate behaviors such as flight. We can therefore not exclude that factors such as age, gender, physical condition, or familiarity with technology could lead to the identification of different body motion patterns. However, such discrepancies may highlight interesting causes in motor learning and representation rather than invalidating the proposed identification method.

The results of this study have a significant importance for the field of teleoperation and more generally HMIs. Often, control strategies are predefined and selected to comply with existing interfaces rather than derived from spontaneous representations of the interaction. The implementation of a methodology to identify body-machine patterns for specific applications could

lead to the development of more intuitive and effective interfaces, which could in turn reduce the training time required to reach proficiency, limit the workload associated with the operation of the system, and eventually improve the reliability of teleoperated missions. Moreover, the method described in this article could be extended to different populations, machines, and operations, including individuals with limited or impaired body functions.

## Methods

Seventeen subjects participated in Experiment 1, in which they were asked to produce self-selected upper-body movements corresponding to predefined

drone commands. For Experiment 2, 44 new participants were asked to steer a virtual drone using the Torso or the Torso and Arms strategy during a single session. Sixteen randomly selected participants repeated this task on two additional, consecutive days. Ten new participants were recruited for Experiment 3. They were first asked to control a virtual drone using the Torso strategy and afterward to steer a real drone through circular gates (see *SI Appendix* for details). The experiments were approved by the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne Brain Mind Institute Ethics Committee for Human Behavioral Research and the Ethics Committee Geneva.

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