

Introduction aux signaux et systèmes

Two-dimensional closed systems

Lecture 2

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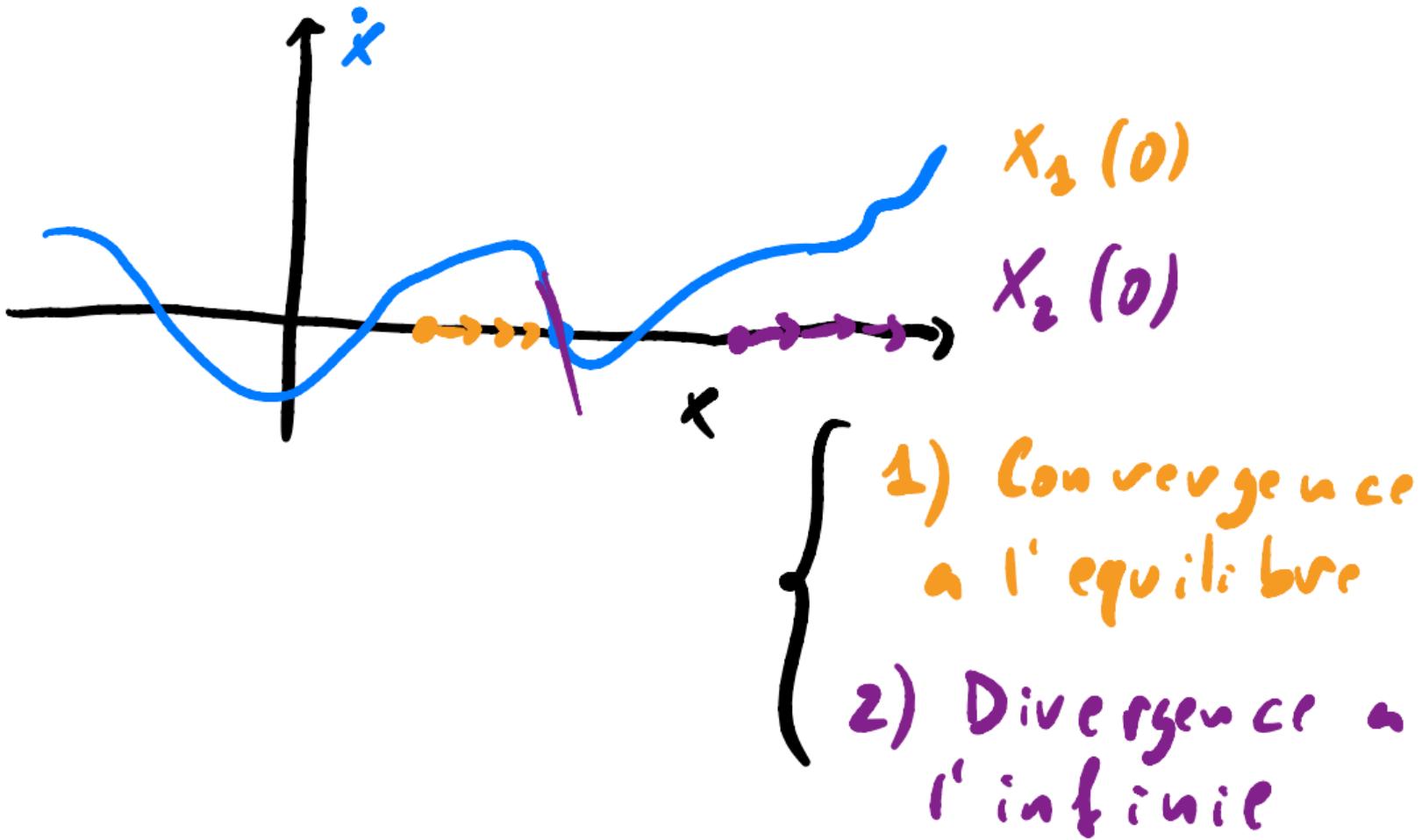
February 13, 2026

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Why going beyond one dimension



One-dimensional closed systems cannot oscillate

Consider the **one** dimensional closed system $\dot{x} = f(x)$. When passing through any point x in the state space, the system's trajectory is either increasing ($f(x) > 0$), decreasing ($f(x) < 0$), or at rest ($f(x) = 0$).

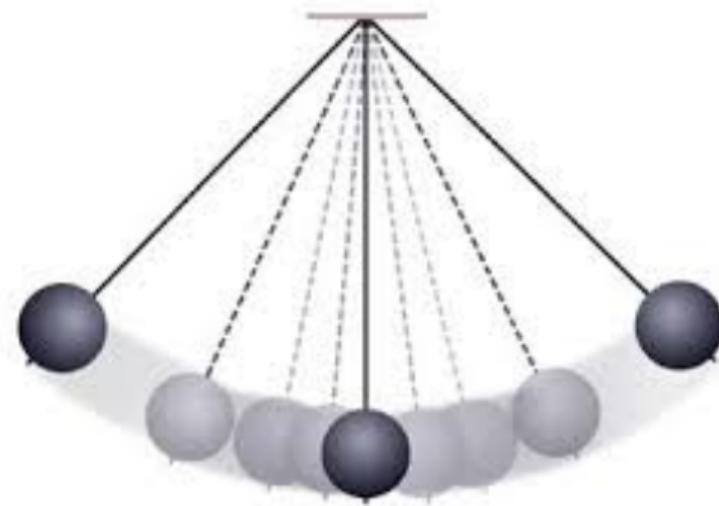
For oscillations to occur, the system's trajectory would have to pass through the same state x some times with positive speed ($f(x) > 0$) and other times with negative speed ($f(x) < 0$).

This is impossible. Indeed:

Fact: Trajectories of one-dimensional closed systems are monotone

Any trajectory of a one-dimensional closed system either increases or decreases asymptotically toward an equilibrium point or diverge monotonically to $\pm\infty$.

Even the simplest systems oscillate!



⇒ Need to consider systems with $n > 1$ -dimensional state-space.

Two-dimensional closed systems

Two-dimensional vector fields

Consider the two-dimensional closed system (of ordinary differential equations)

x : state

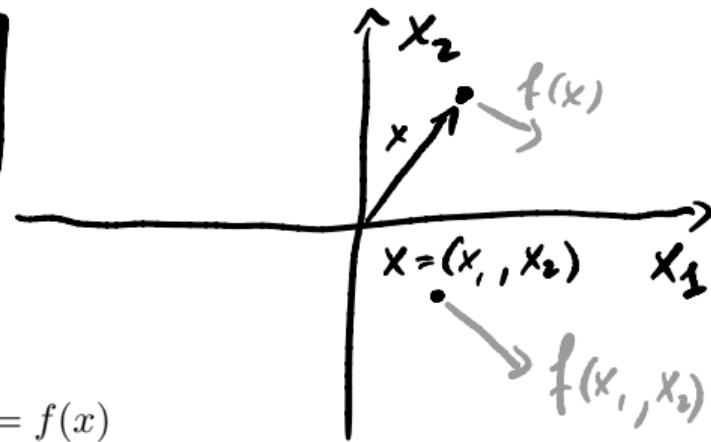
$$\begin{aligned}\dot{x}_1 &= f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ \dot{x}_2 &= f_2(x_1, x_2)\end{aligned}$$

It associates to any point $x = \begin{pmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \end{pmatrix} \in \mathbb{R}^2$ the vector

$f: \mathbb{R}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2$

$$\dot{x} = \begin{pmatrix} \dot{x}_1 \\ \dot{x}_2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ f_2(x_1, x_2) \end{pmatrix} = f(x)$$

that dictates in which direction (increasing, decreasing, rest) and with which speed each of two states x_1 and x_2 is changing.

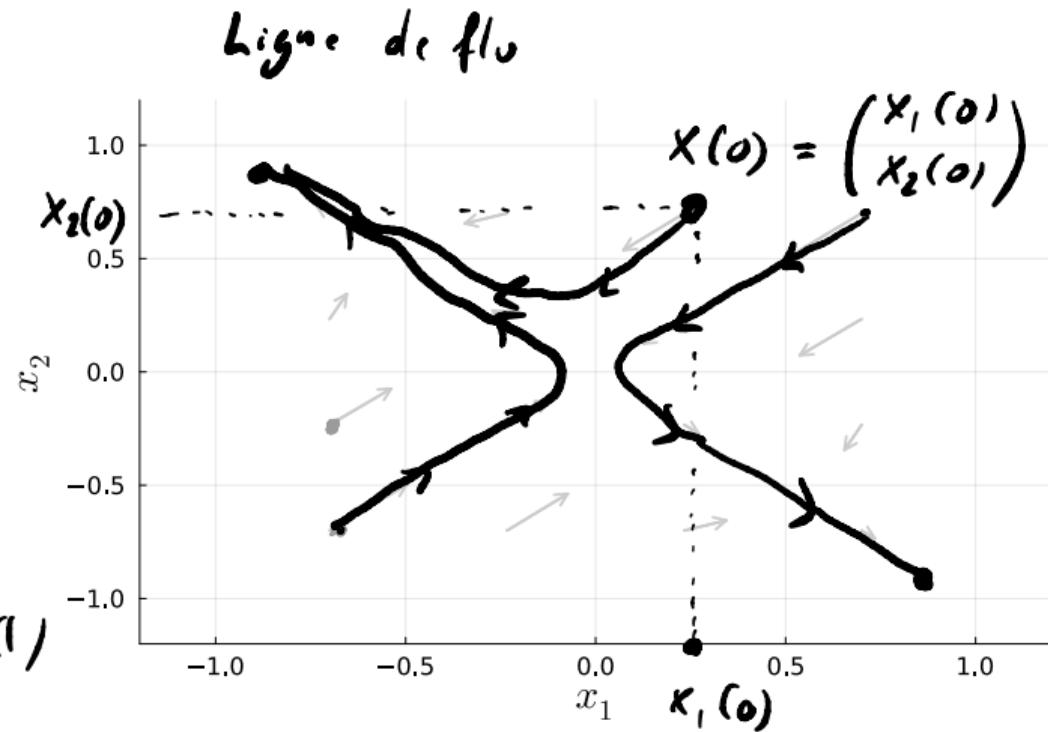


Two-dimensional vector fields

Example: Mutual inhibition

$$\begin{aligned}\dot{x}_1 &= -x_1 - \tanh(2x_2) \\ \dot{x}_2 &= -x_2 - \tanh(2x_1)\end{aligned}\} \quad (1)$$

Les lignes de flu sont
solutions du système (1)

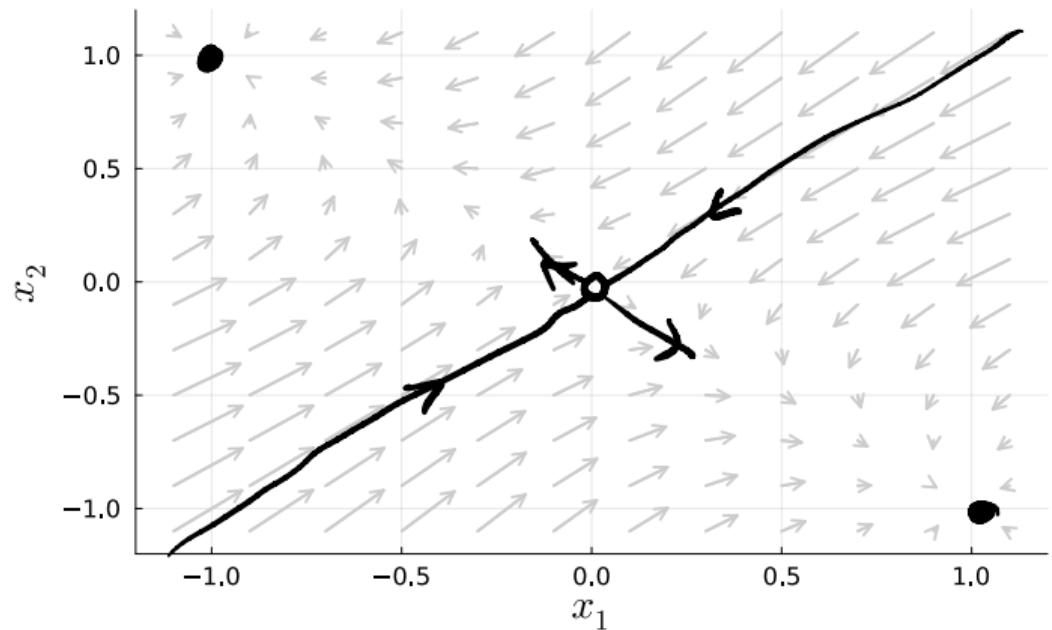


The “flow” (trajectories) of two-dimensional vector fields

Example: Mutual inhibition

$$\dot{x}_1 = -x_1 - \tanh(2x_2)$$

$$\dot{x}_2 = -x_2 - \tanh(2x_1)$$

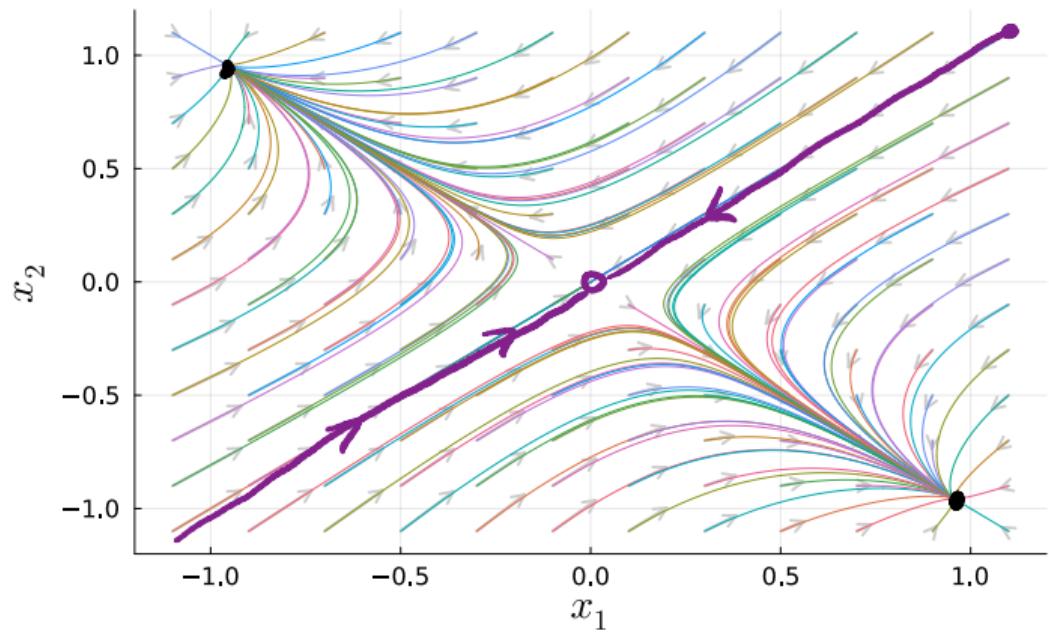


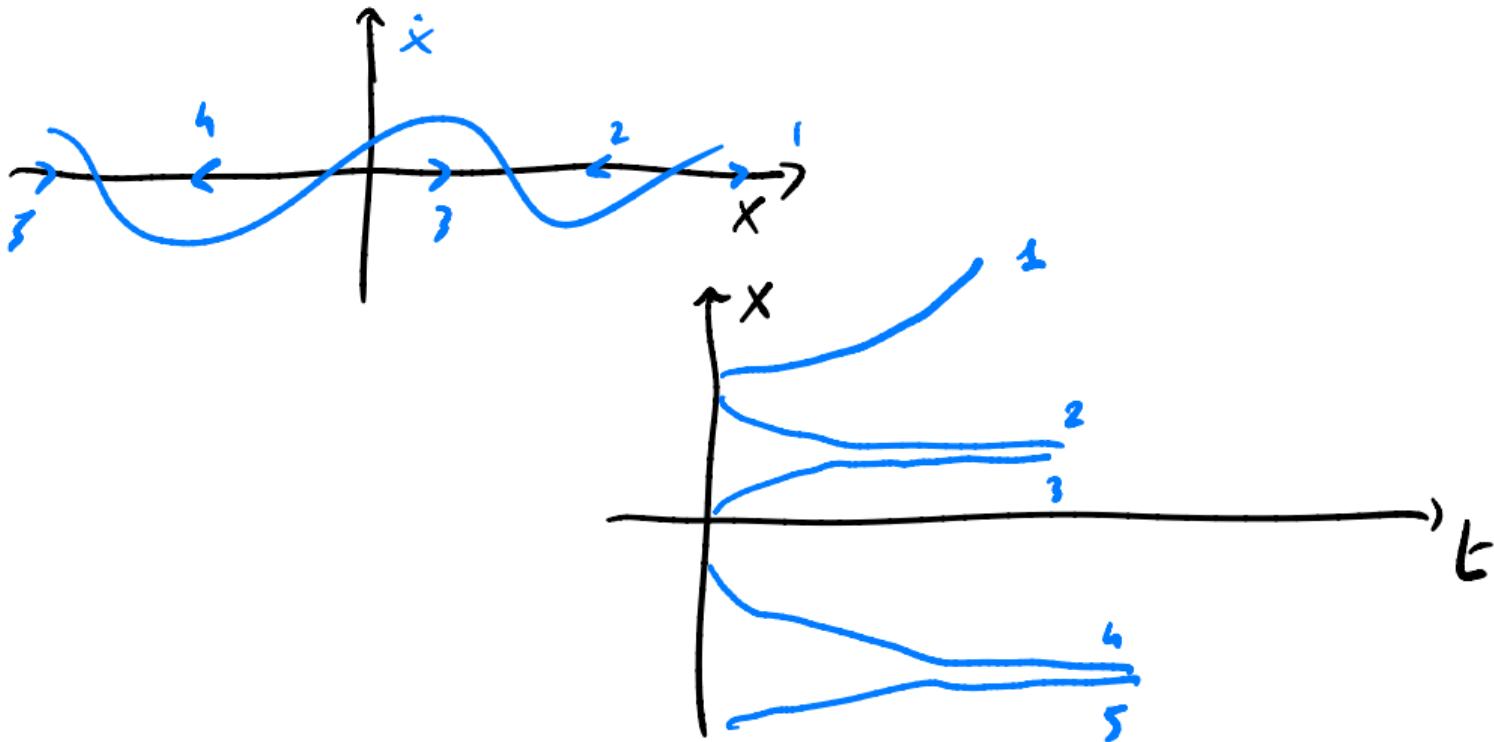
The “flow” (trajectories) of two-dimensional vector fields

Example: Mutual inhibition

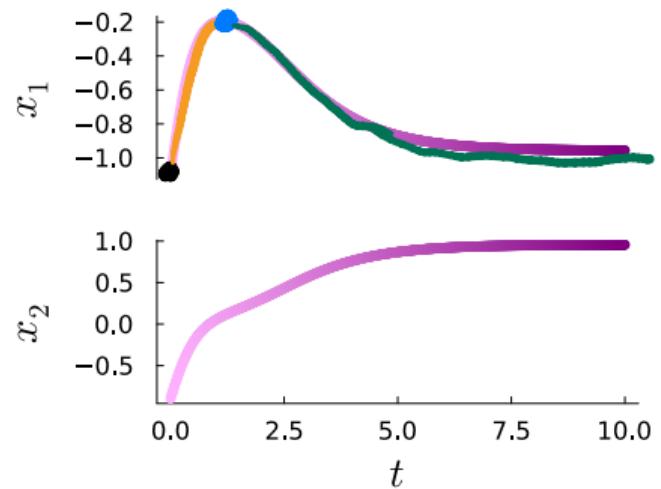
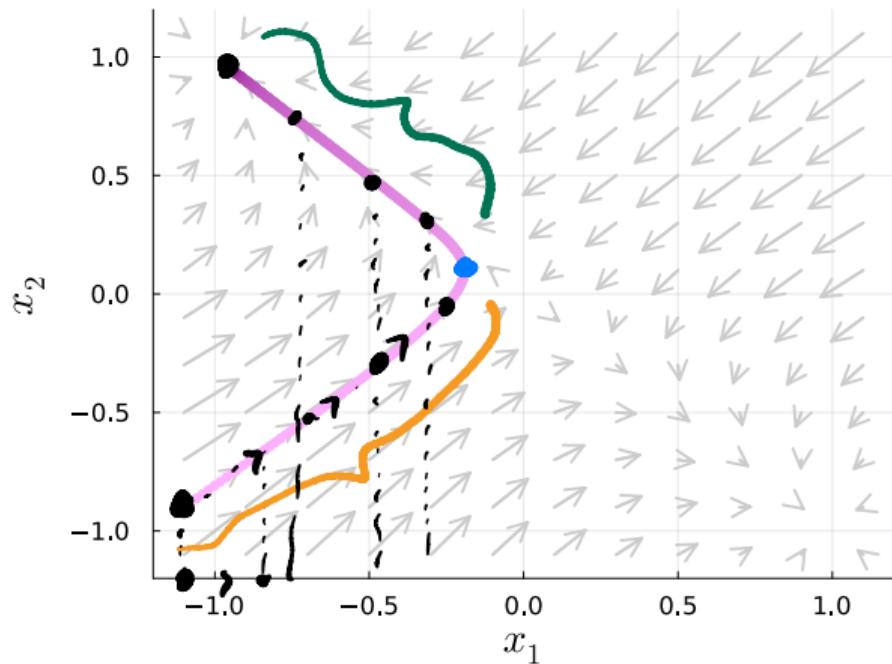
$$\dot{x}_1 = -x_1 - \tanh(2x_2)$$

$$\dot{x}_2 = -x_2 - \tanh(2x_1)$$





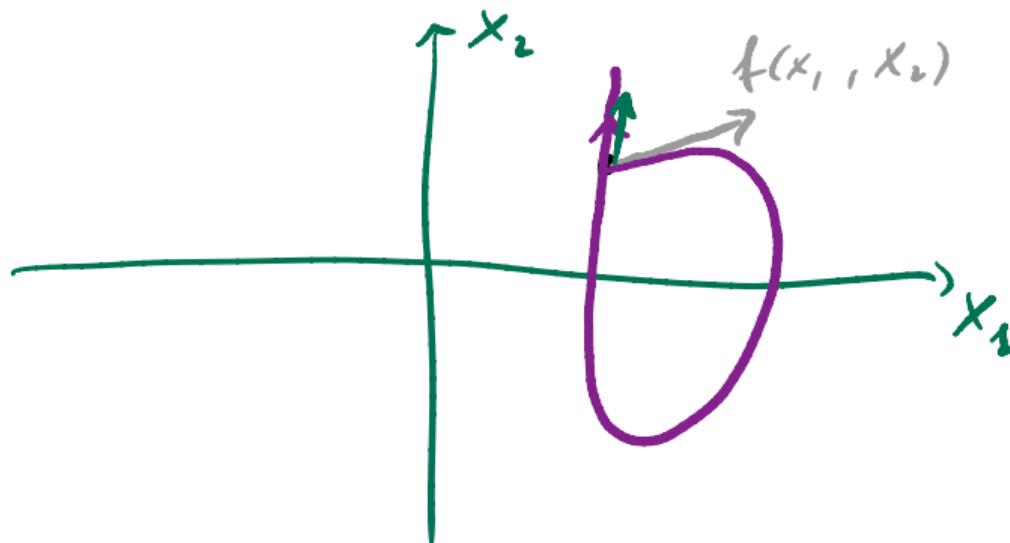
The “flow” (trajectories) of two-dimensional vector fields



The “flow” (trajectories) of two-dimensional vector fields

Fact: trajectories cannot intersect

Since the speed vector $\dot{x} = \begin{pmatrix} f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ f_2(x_1, x_2) \end{pmatrix}$ at any state-space point (x_1, x_2) is uniquely determined, there is one and only one trajectory passing through (x_1, x_2) .



Nullclines and equilibria of two-dimensional vector fields

Nullclines: Multi-dimensional generalizations of equilibria

null \approx zero

$$\begin{aligned}0 &= -x_1 - \tanh(2x_2) \\ \Leftrightarrow x_1 &= -\tanh(2x_2) \\ x_2 &= -\tanh(2x_1)\end{aligned}$$

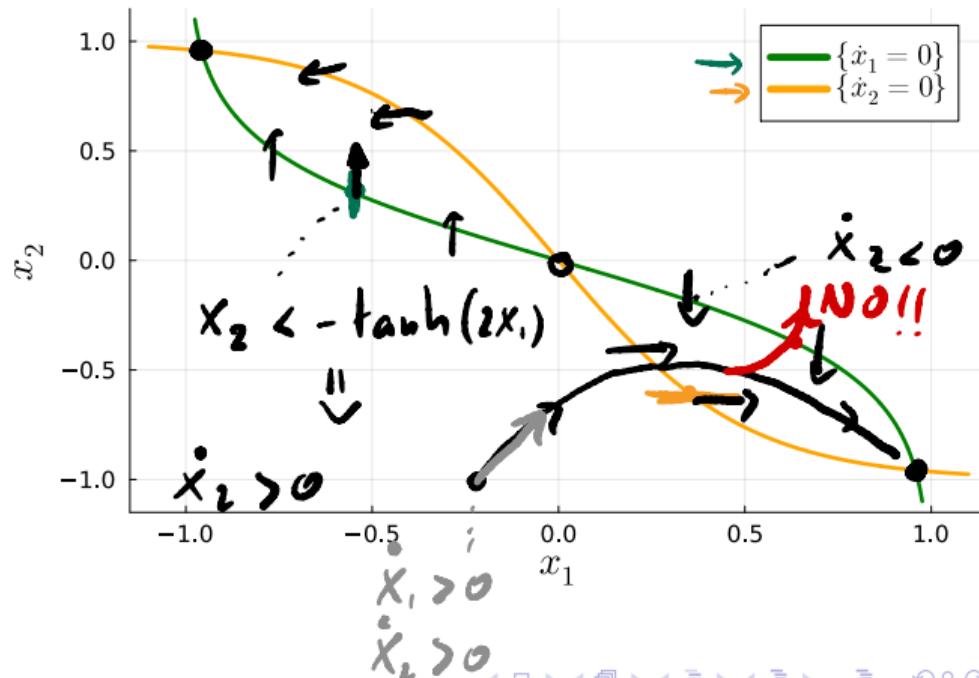
$$\begin{aligned}\dot{x}_1 &= -x_1 - \tanh(2x_2) \\ \dot{x}_2 &= -x_2 - \tanh(2x_1)\end{aligned}$$

Definition: nullclines

The nullcline of variable x_i or x_i -nullcline is the set of state-space points where $\dot{x}_i = 0$:

$$\{(x_1, x_2) : \dot{x}_i = f_i(x_1, x_2) = 0\}$$

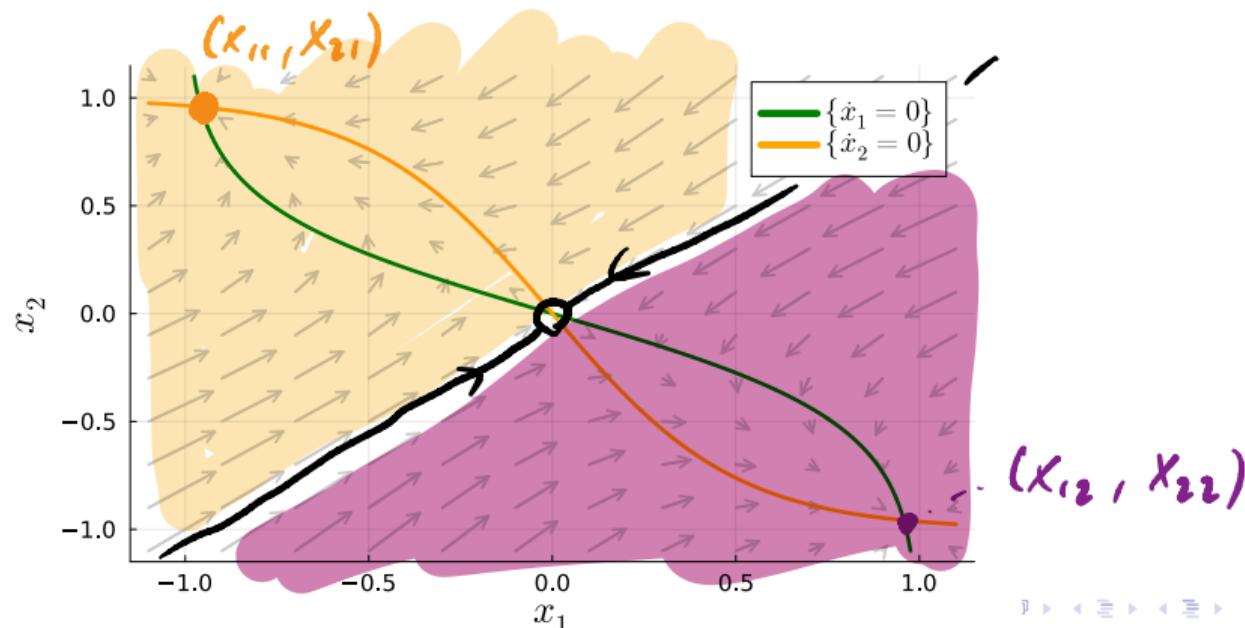
i.e., the states where variable x_i is (momentarily) at rest.



Nullclines and state-space analysis

Nullclines partition the state space in disconnected regions. Inside each region the sign of \dot{x}_1 and \dot{x}_2 , hence the “direction” of the vector field, do not change.

This provides a qualitative/geometric viewpoint to understand and predict the system's trajectories.



Equilibria of two-dimensional systems

Definition: Equilibrium points in two-dimension

A state $x^* = (x_1^*, x_2^*)$ is an equilibrium of the system

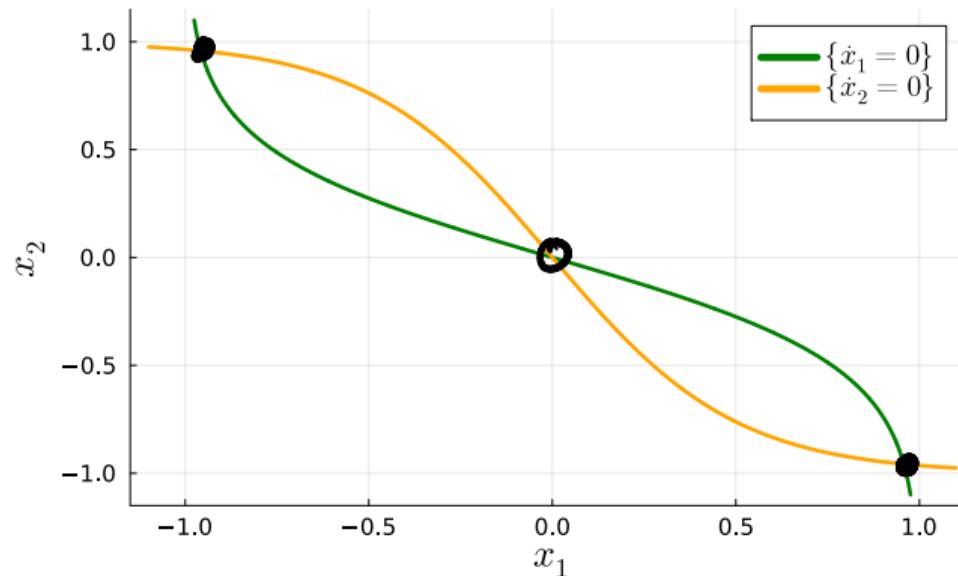
$$\begin{aligned}\dot{x}_1 &= f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ \dot{x}_2 &= f_2(x_1, x_2)\end{aligned}$$

if both x_1 and x_2 are at rest at x^* , that is, if

$$f_1(x_1^*, x_2^*) = f_2(x_1^*, x_2^*) = 0$$

Equilibria of two-dimensional systems

Hence, equilibrium points of two-dimensional systems are exactly the points where the two nullclines intersect.



Stability of equilibria in two dimensions

Let $x^* = (x_1^*, x_2^*)$ be an equilibrium of the system $\begin{pmatrix} \dot{x}_1 \\ \dot{x}_2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ f_2(x_1, x_2) \end{pmatrix}$

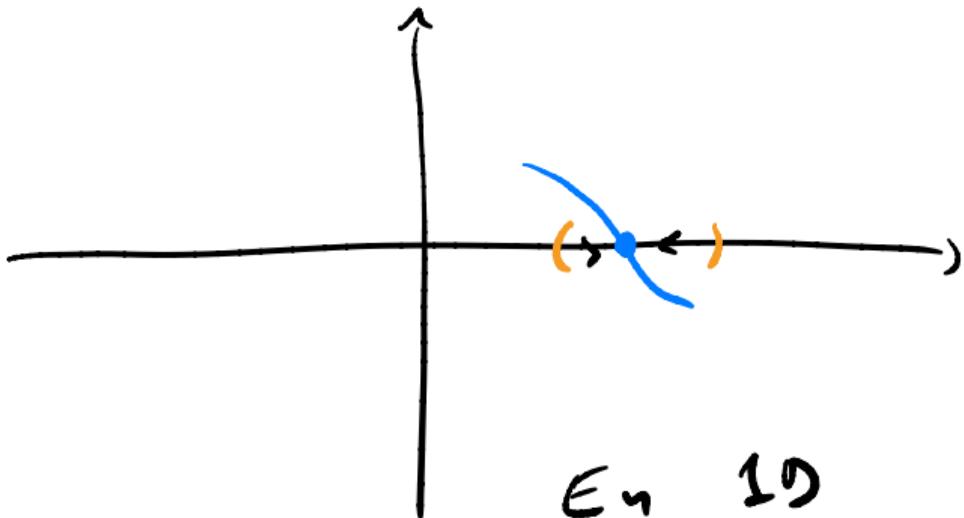
Definition: Stable and unstable equilibria

The equilibrium x^* is **stable** if:

- ① it attracts all nearby trajectories, i.e., the trajectory $x(t)$ converges to x^* for all initial conditions $x(0)$ sufficiently close to x^* ;
- ② trajectories that start sufficiently close to x^* remain close to it for all time (*Lyapunov stability*)

An equilibrium is **unstable** if it is not stable.

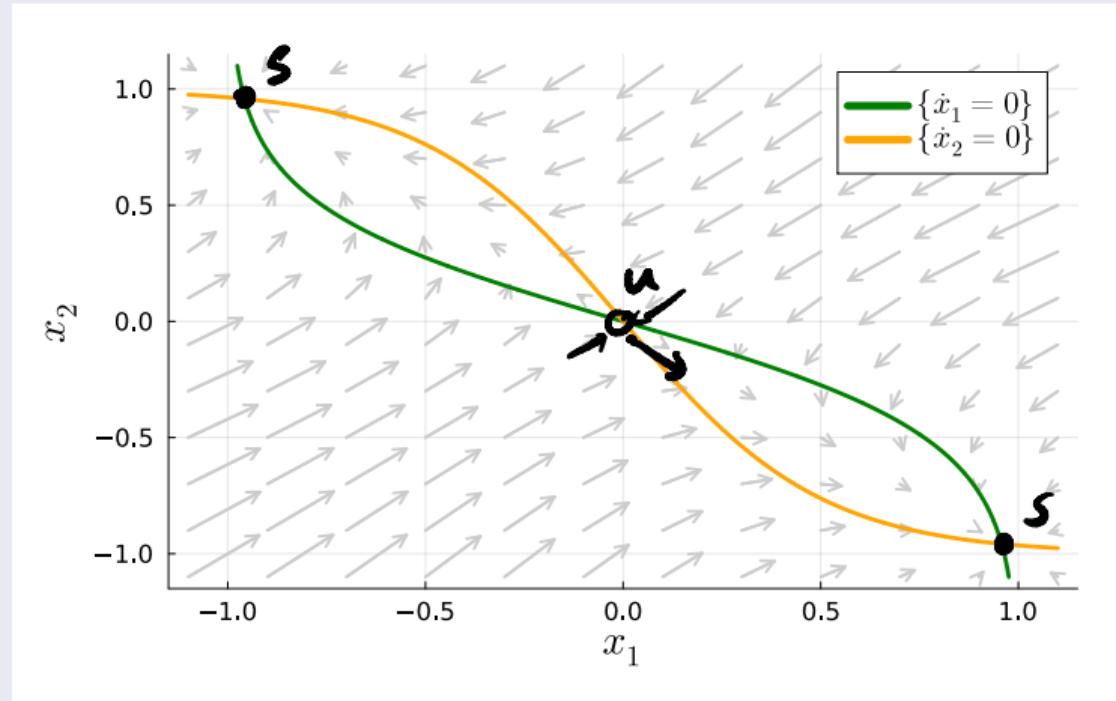
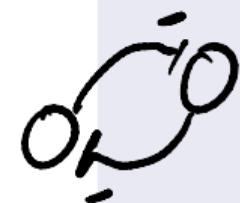
In one dimension $① \Rightarrow ②$. However, the same is not true in dimension two and above.



In 1D
attractivity \Leftrightarrow stability

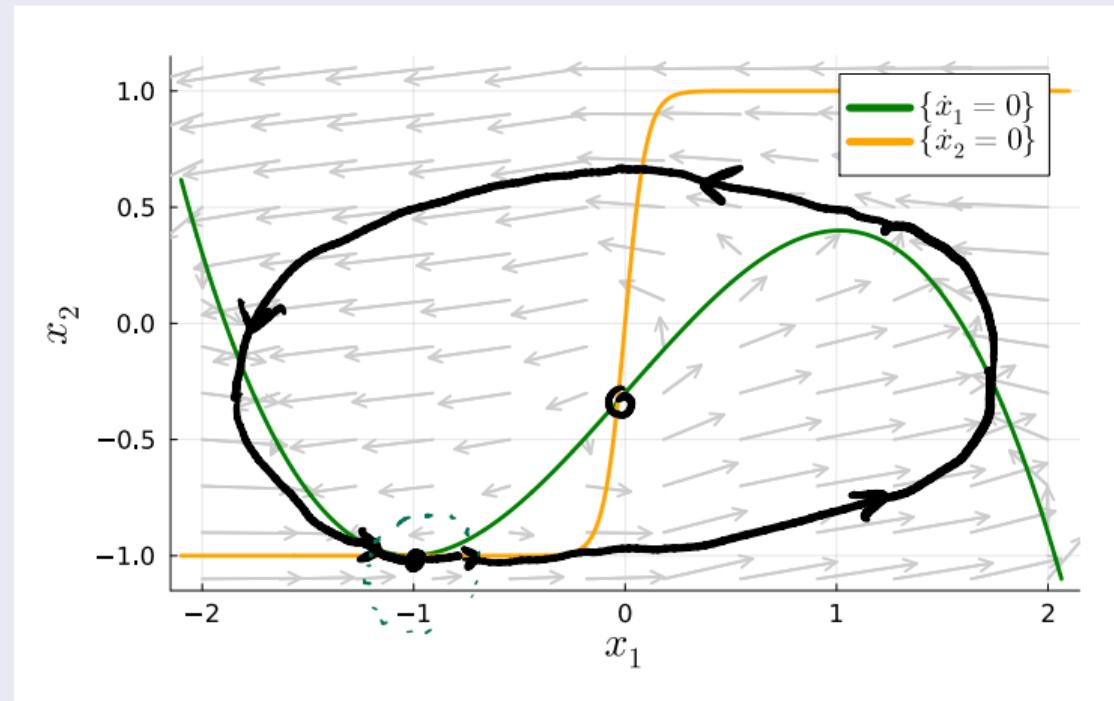
Stability of equilibria in two dimensions

Example1

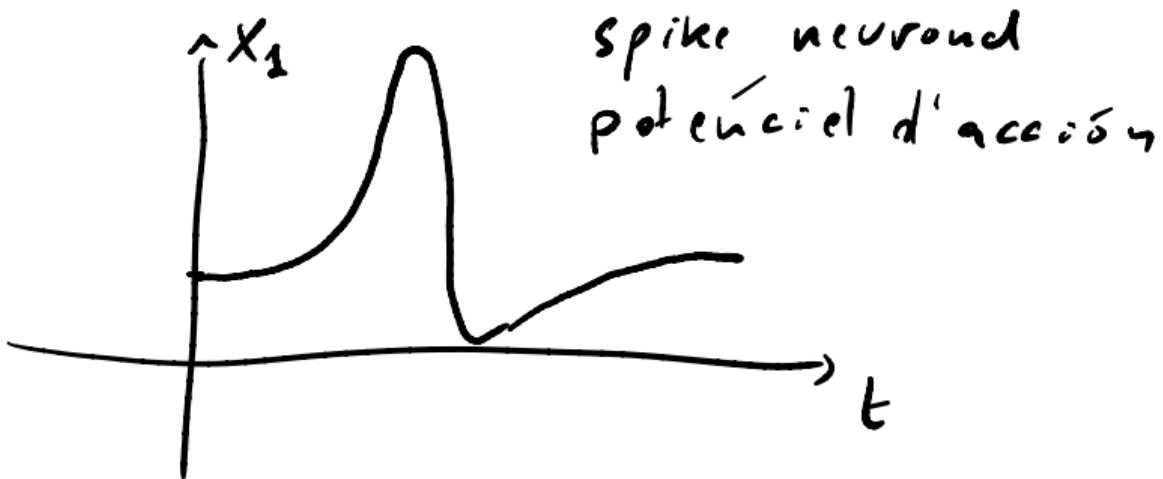


Stability of equilibria in two dimensions

Example 2: An attractive but not Lyapunov stable equilibrium



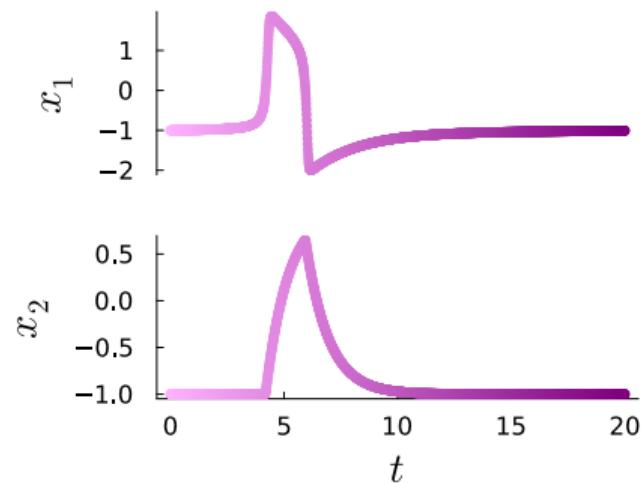
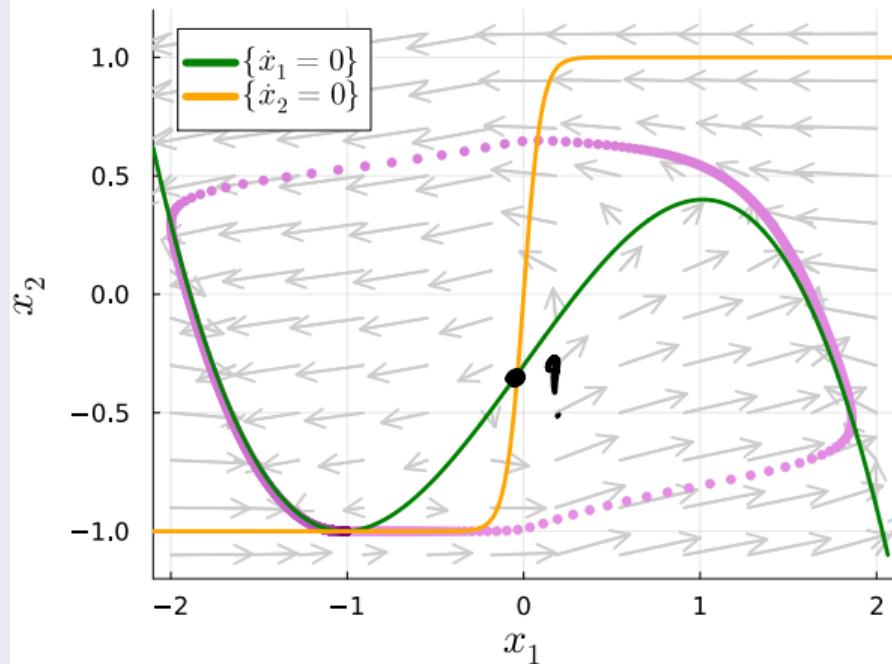
Excitabilité



Spike neuronal
potencial d'acció

Stability of equilibria in two dimensions

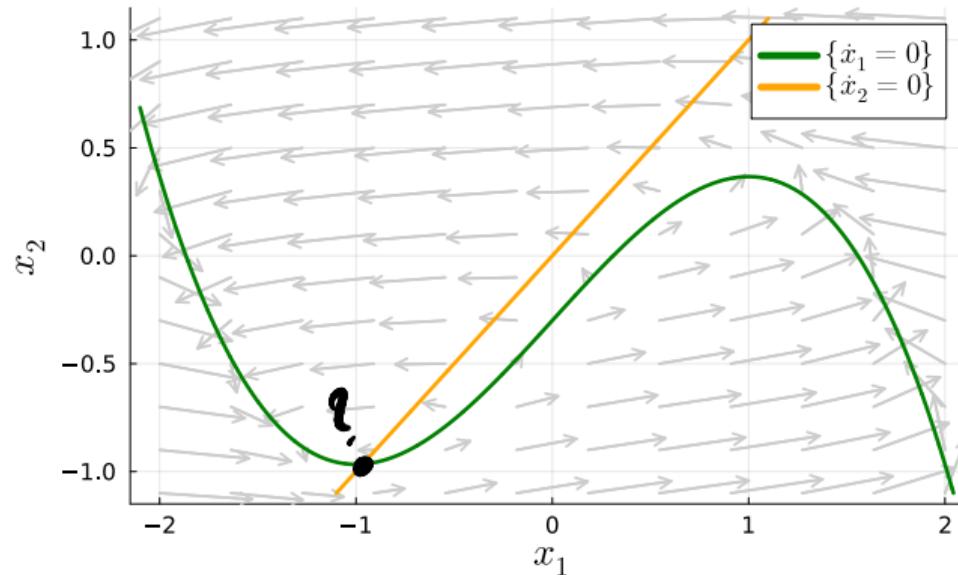
Example 2: An attractive but not Lyapunov stable equilibrium



Nullclines and state-space analysis: limitations

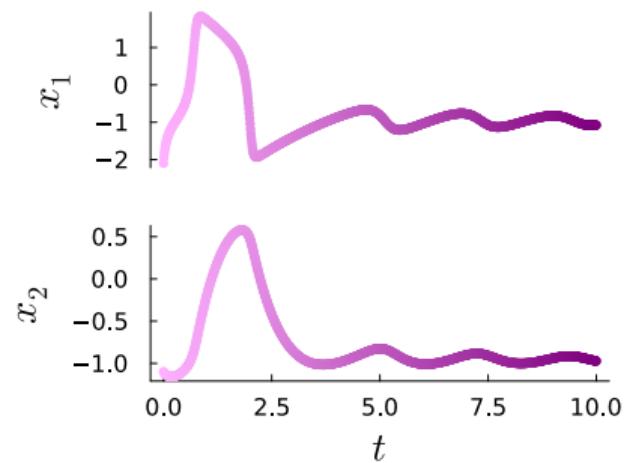
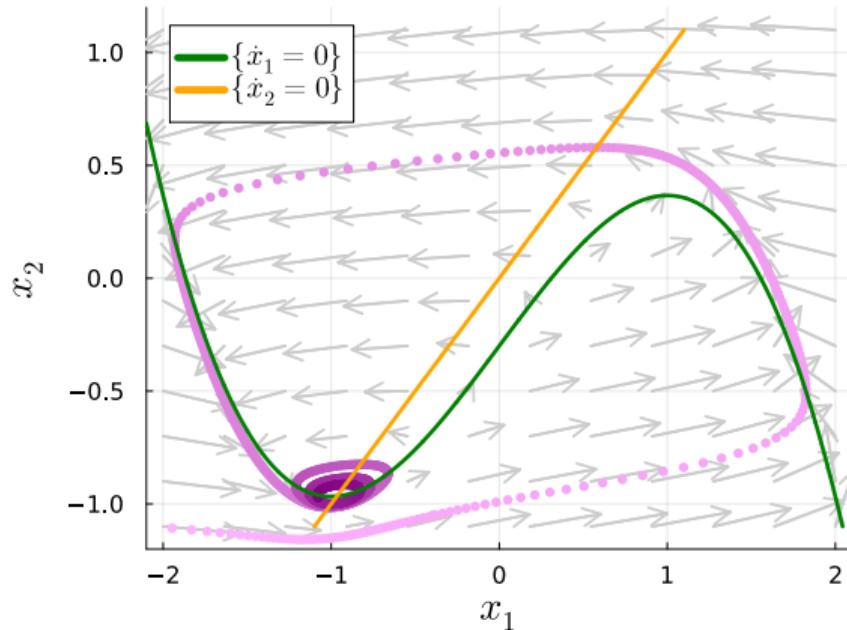
The purely qualitative approach of nullcline analysis has major limitations. For instance:

Is the equilibrium of this two-dimensional system stable or unstable?



Nullclines and state-space analysis: limitations

In hindsight, by inspecting the system behavior, we can guess it is stable but nullcline analysis falls short in explaining or predicting this observation...



$e^{\lambda t}$

Linearization of two-dimensional vector fields

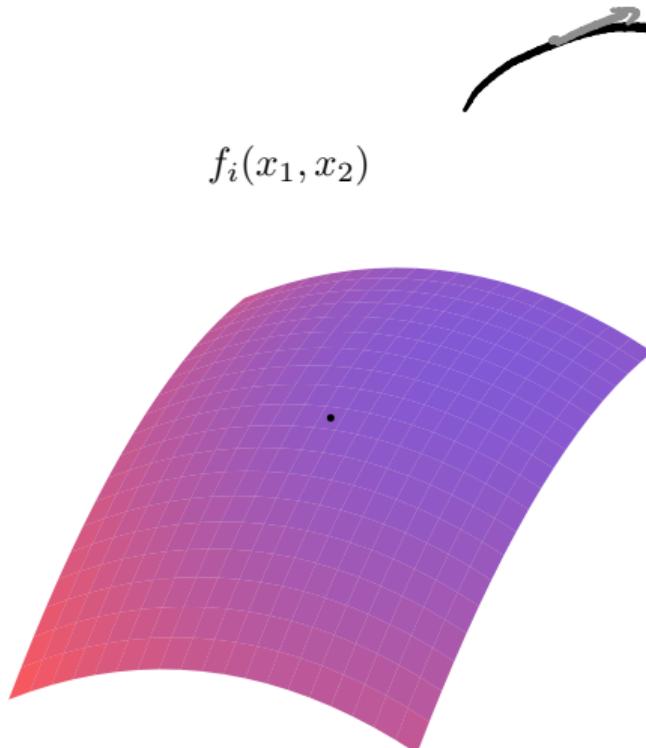
First-order Taylor expansion of two-dimensional vector fields

Similarly to what we did in one dimension,
given an equilibrium $x^* = (x_1^*, x_2^*)$ of a
two-dimensional vector field

$$\dot{x} = \begin{pmatrix} \dot{x}_1 \\ \dot{x}_2 \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} f_1(x_1, x_2) \\ f_2(x_1, x_2) \end{pmatrix} = f(x)$$

we can find a linear function that
approximates f around x^* using Taylor
expansion methods.

⇒ In other words, we will approximate
 $f_i(x_1, x_2)$, $i = 1, 2$, by its **tangent plane** at
 x^* .



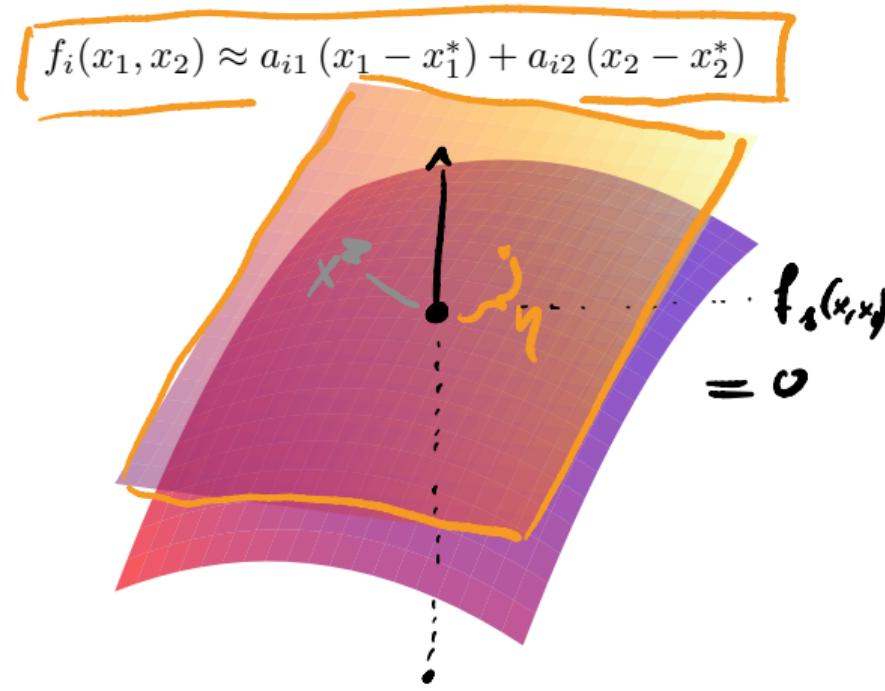
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First-order Taylor expansion of two-dimensional vector fields

More rigorously, let $\eta = \begin{pmatrix} \eta_1 \\ \eta_2 \end{pmatrix} = \underbrace{x - x^*}_{x^*}$ be the state of the system relative to the equilibrium x^* . As in the one-dimensional case, in the new coordinates η the system becomes

$$\dot{\eta} = \frac{d}{dt}(x - x^*) = \dot{x} = f(x) = f(x^* + \eta)$$

$\frac{dx^*}{dt} = 0$

For x sufficiently close to x^* , that is, for $\|\eta\|$ sufficiently small¹, using the Taylor expansion we obtain

$$\begin{aligned}\dot{\eta} = f(x^* + \eta) &= \underbrace{f(x^*)}_{\text{Order 0}} + \left(\begin{array}{cc} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_1} & \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_2} \\ \frac{\partial f_2}{\partial x_1} & \frac{\partial f_2}{\partial x_2} \end{array} \right) \Bigg|_{x=x^*} \cdot \eta + \underbrace{\mathcal{O}(\eta_1^2, \eta_2^2, \eta_1 \eta_2)}_{\text{Higher orders}} \\ &= \underbrace{f(x^* + \eta)}_{\text{Order 1}} \Bigg|_{\eta=0} \Rightarrow \eta = 0 \quad \eta = \begin{pmatrix} \eta_1 \\ \eta_2 \end{pmatrix}\end{aligned}$$

¹The Euclidean norm $\|x\|$ of a vector $x \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is $\|x\| = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2}$

The linearized two dimensional dynamics

$$\dot{x} = Ax$$

$$\eta_i = x_i - x_i^*$$

Neglecting higher order terms for small enough $\|\eta\|$, we obtain the linearized two-dimensional dynamics

$$\boxed{\dot{\eta} = J_{x^*} \eta,} \quad J_{x^*} = \left(\begin{array}{cc} \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_1} & \frac{\partial f_1}{\partial x_2} \\ \frac{\partial f_2}{\partial x_1} & \frac{\partial f_2}{\partial x_2} \end{array} \right) \Bigg|_{x=x^*} = A$$

The matrix J_{x^*} is called the **Jacobian** of the system at x^* . Its entries, i.e., the partial derivatives $\frac{\partial f_i}{\partial x_j}$, $i, j = 1, 2$, fully determine the behavior of the system's trajectories close to x^* .

Linearization-based classification of two-dimensional equilibria

Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems

Consider the linear two-dimensional system

$$\dot{x} = Ax, \quad x \in \mathbb{R}^2, \quad A = \begin{pmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} \end{pmatrix}$$

Let $\tau = \text{trace}(A) = a_{11} + a_{22}$ be the trace of the matrix A and $\Delta = \det(A) = a_{11}a_{22} - a_{21}a_{12}$ be its determinant. The eigenvalues λ_1, λ_2 of A are given by

$$\boxed{\lambda_1 = \frac{\tau + \sqrt{\tau^2 - 4\Delta}}{2}}$$

$$\boxed{\lambda_2 = \frac{\tau - \sqrt{\tau^2 - 4\Delta}}{2}}$$

Let v_1, v_2 be the associated eigenvectors.

- If $\tau^2 > 4\Delta$ eigenvalues and eigenvectors are real.
- If $\tau^2 < 4\Delta$ eigenvalues and eigenvectors are complex and, in particular $\lambda_2 = \bar{\lambda}_1$ and $v_2 = \bar{v}_1$.²

² \bar{z} denotes the complex conjugate of $z \in \mathbb{C}^n$.

$$\det \begin{pmatrix} a_{11} - \lambda & a_{12} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} - \lambda \end{pmatrix} =$$

$$= (a_{11} - \lambda)(a_{22} - \lambda) - a_{12}a_{21} =$$

$$= a_{11}a_{22} - \lambda(a_{11} + a_{22}) + \lambda^2 - a_{12}a_{21}$$

$$= \lambda^2 - \lambda(a_{11} + a_{22}) - a_{12}a_{21} + a_{11}a_{22} = 0$$

$$A = 1$$

$$B = -(a_{11} + a_{22}) = -\gamma$$

$$C = -a_{12}a_{21} + a_{11}a_{22} = \Delta$$

$$\lambda = \frac{-B \pm \sqrt{B^2 - 4AC}}{2A}$$

Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems

$$A \boldsymbol{v}_1 = \lambda_1 \boldsymbol{v}_1$$

$$A \boldsymbol{v}_2 = \lambda_2 \boldsymbol{v}_2$$

Since
 $A = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix}$

Given initial conditions $x(0)$, the solution of the system is

$$x(t) = c_1 e^{\lambda_1 t} \boldsymbol{v}_1 + c_2 e^{\lambda_2 t} \boldsymbol{v}_2,$$

$$c_1 = \langle x(0), \boldsymbol{v}_1 \rangle, \quad c_2 = \langle x(0), \boldsymbol{v}_2 \rangle$$

3

In other words, the solution can be split into a component $c_1 e^{\lambda_1 t} \boldsymbol{v}_1$ that evolves along the first eigenvector \boldsymbol{v}_1 and a component $c_2 e^{\lambda_2 t} \boldsymbol{v}_2$ that evolves along the second eigenvector \boldsymbol{v}_2 .

$$\uparrow \quad \boldsymbol{v}_1, \boldsymbol{v}_2 \in \mathbb{R}^2$$

Depending on whether eigenvalues and eigenvectors are real or imaginary the solution can exhibit drastically distinct behaviors.

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³The scalar product $\langle x, z \rangle$ of two vectors $x, z \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is $\langle x, z \rangle = \sum_{i=1}^n x_i z_i$.

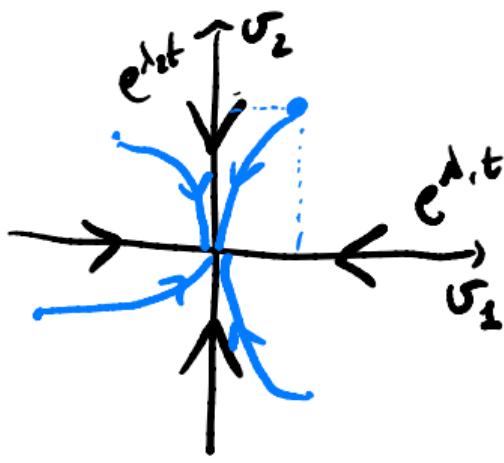
Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems: real case

When $\tau^2 > 4\Delta$ and therefore $\lambda_1, \lambda_2 \in \mathbb{R}$ and $v_1, v_2 \in \mathbb{R}^2$, the solution

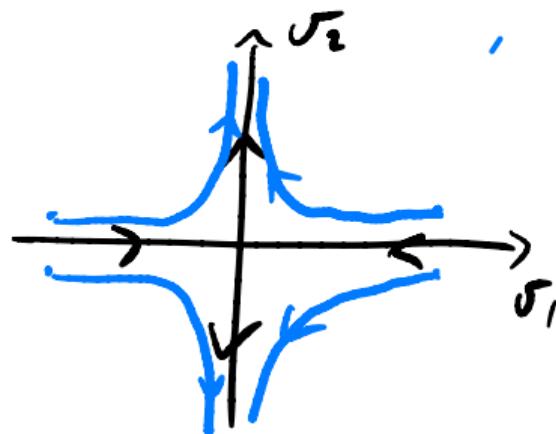
$$x(t) = c_1 e^{\lambda_1 t} v_1 + c_2 e^{\lambda_2 t} v_2, \quad c_1 = \langle x(0), v_1 \rangle, \quad c_2 = \langle x(0), v_2 \rangle$$

has a simple geometric interpretation.

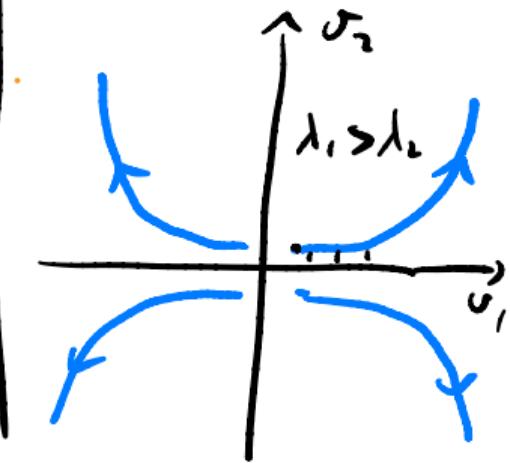
$$\lambda_1, \lambda_2 < 0$$



$$\lambda_1 < 0, \lambda_2 > 0$$



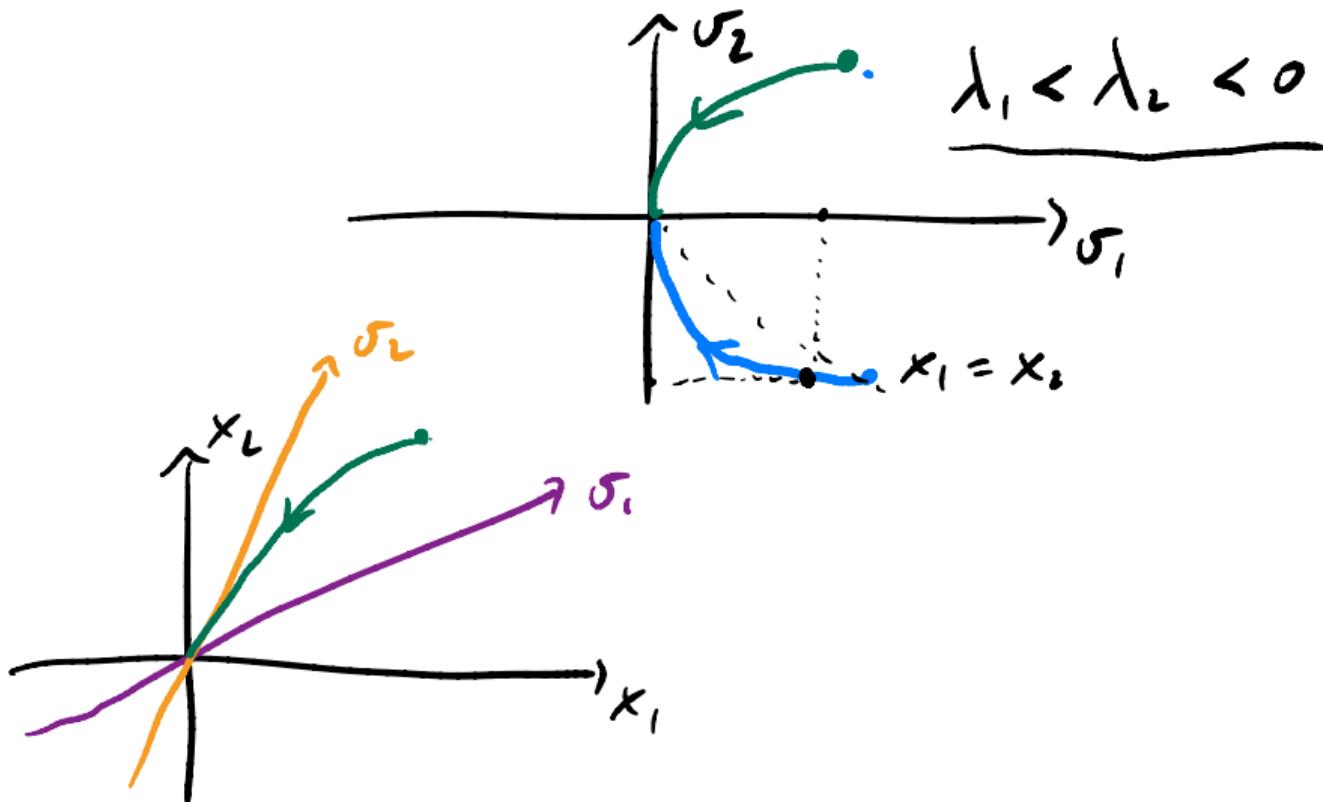
$$\lambda_1, \lambda_2 > 0$$

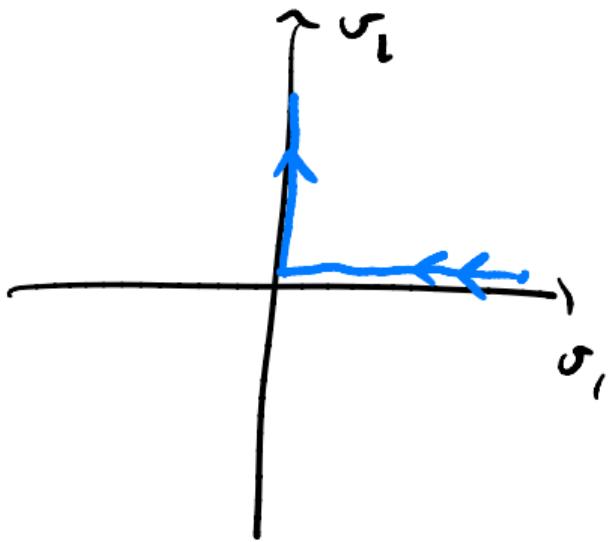


$$U = \begin{bmatrix} U_1 & U_2 \end{bmatrix}$$

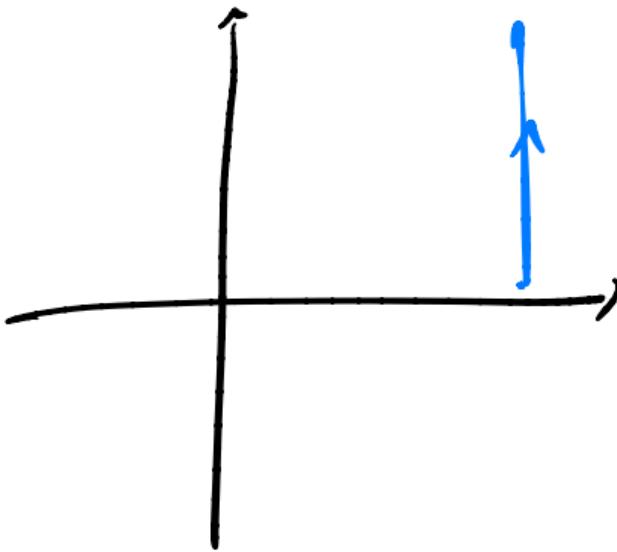
$$v = U^{-1}x$$

$$x = Uv$$





$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \lambda_1 < \sigma < \lambda_2 \\ |\lambda_1| \gg \lambda_2 \end{array} \right\}$$



$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \lambda_1 < \sigma < \lambda_2 \\ |\lambda_1| \ll \lambda_2 \end{array} \right.$$

Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems: real case

In the case of real eigenvalues and eigenvectors there are three generic distinct cases

$$\lambda_1 < \lambda_2 < 0$$

$$\lambda_1 < 0 < \lambda_2$$

$$0 < \lambda_1 < \lambda_2$$

Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems: imaginary case

When $\tau^2 < 4\Delta$ and therefore $\lambda_1 = \bar{\lambda}_2 = \lambda \in \mathbb{C}$ and $v_1 = \bar{v}_2 = v \in \mathbb{C}^2$, to understand the behavior of the solution

$$\sigma_1 = \sigma, \sigma_2 = \bar{\sigma}$$

$$x(t) = c_1 e^{(\sigma+j\omega)t} v + c_2 e^{(\sigma-j\omega)t} \bar{v}, \quad c_1 = \langle x(0), v_1 \rangle, \quad c_2 = \langle x(0), v_2 \rangle = \bar{c}_1$$

let $\lambda = \sigma + j\omega$, $\sigma, \omega \in \mathbb{R}$, $v = \nu + j\mu$, $\nu, \mu \in \mathbb{R}^2$, and observe that

$$\uparrow =$$

$$c_2 e^{(\sigma-j\omega)t} \bar{v} = \overline{c_1 e^{(\sigma+j\omega)t} v}.$$

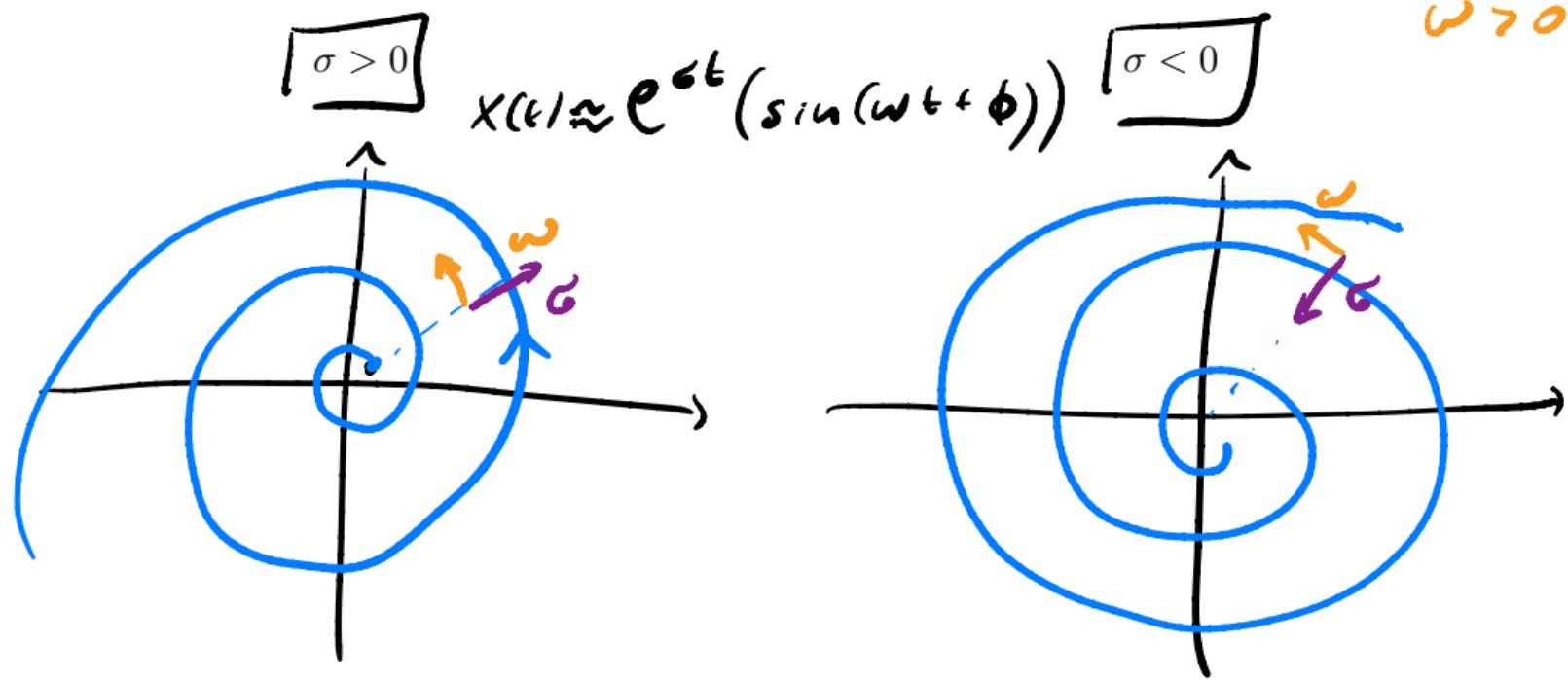
It follows that

$$x(t) = \Re(c_1 e^{(\sigma+j\omega)t} v) = |c_1| e^{\sigma t} \Re(e^{j\omega t + \angle c_1} (\nu + j\mu)) = |c_1| e^{\sigma t} (\cos(\omega t + \angle c_1) \nu + \sin(\omega t + \angle c_1) \mu)$$

That is, $x(t)$ is the sum of two trajectories spiraling away from ($\sigma > 0$) or toward to ($\sigma < 0$) the origin and oscillating with the same frequency ω but $\pi/2$ phase difference along the eigenvector real and imaginary part, respectively.

Solutions of two-dimensional linear systems: imaginary case

In the case of imaginary eigenvalues and eigenvectors there are two generic distinct cases



Summary of two-dimensional linear dynamical behavior

