

Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

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Significance

Outcomes of Gabor's 1946 paper, "Theory of Communication"¹:

- ➊ First introduction of the time-frequency uncertainty principle, leading to an explosion of wavelet research in the 80s²
- ➋ Proposed that any signal of finite energy can be decomposed into a linear combination of time-frequency shifts of the Gaussian function³
- ➌ First use of the STFT, or the windowed Fourier transform with Gaussian windows⁴
- ➍ Showed that Gaussian-windowed STFT minimizes time-frequency uncertainty

¹Dennis Gabor. "Theory of Communication". In: *Journal of Institution of Electrical Engineers* 93.3 (1946), pp. 429–457. URL:

<http://www.granularsynthesis.com/pdf/gabor.pdf>.

²Peter Hill. "Dennis Gabor - Contributions to Communication Theory Signal Processing". In: Oct. 2007, pp. 2632–2637. DOI: 10.1109/EURCON.2007.4400546.

³Vignon Sourou Oussa. *Why was the Nobel prize winner D. Gabor wrong?* URL: <http://webhost.bridgew.edu/voussa/images/Presentations/Gabor.pdf>.

⁴*Fourier and Wavelet Signal Processing*. Cambridge University Press, Jan. 2013. URL: http://www.fourierandwavelets.org/FWSP_a3.2_2013.pdf.

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Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in quantum physics⁵:

$$\sigma_x \sigma_p \geq \frac{h}{4\pi}$$

Heisenberg, 1927:

the more precisely the position [of an electron] is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known, and conversely

⁵M. Hall. "Resolution and uncertainty in spectral decomposition". In: *First Break* 24.12 (2006). ISSN: 0263-5046. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3997/1365-2397.2006027>. URL: <https://www.earthdoc.org/content/journals/10.3997/1365-2397.2006027>.

└ Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle

- in the world of quantum physics this is a core of the Copenhagen school, which Einstein disagreed with. this seems to be a fundamental limitation of the universe (as far as we know it)

$$\sigma_x \sigma_p \geq \frac{h}{4\pi}$$

Gabor's Uncertainty Principle

Gabor's time-frequency uncertainty:

$$\sigma_t \sigma_f \geq \frac{1}{4\pi}, \quad \Delta t \Delta f \geq 1$$

Gabor, 1946⁶:

although we can carry out the analysis [of the acoustic signal] with any degree of accuracy in the time direction or frequency direction, we cannot carry it out simultaneously in both beyond a certain limit

⁶Dennis Gabor. "Theory of Communication". In: *Journal of Institution of Electrical Engineers* 93.3 (1946), pp. 429–457. URL: <http://www.granularsynthesis.com/pdf/gabor.pdf>.

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2021-01-27

└ Gabor's Uncertainty Principle

- Gabor says delta f and delta t are the uncertainties inherent in the definition of the epoch t and frequency f of an oscillation
- Just to super emphasize, this is a property of our choice to use the linear Fourier transform. it's not an inherent aspect of acoustic waves or signals, just our choice
- This is a consequence of the Fourier transform, as can be seen in the Flandrin textbook (pointed out by our prof)
- in quantum terms, t and f are conjugate variables, they are Fourier transform duals

$$\sigma_t \sigma_f \geq \frac{1}{4\pi}, \quad \Delta t \Delta f \geq 1$$

Time-frequency tradeoff, intuition

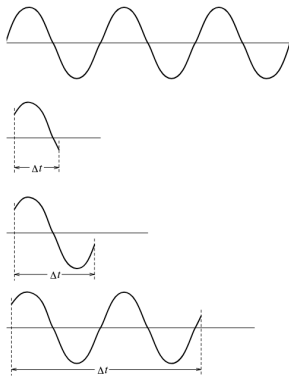


Figure: Improved frequency measurement over longer time intervals. The uncertainty in the frequency Δf decreases as the measurement interval Δt increases and vice versa⁷

⁷Bruce MacLennan. "Gabor Representations of Spatiotemporal Visual Images". In: (Nov. 1994). URL: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~matilde/GaborLocalization.pdf>.

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Time-frequency tradeoff, intuition

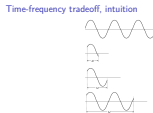


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Gabor's Uncertainty Principle, visual

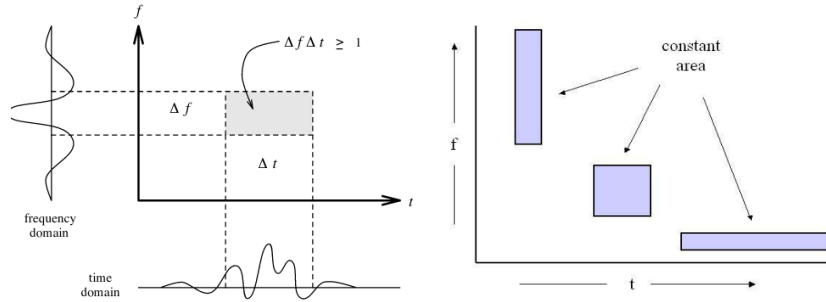


Figure: The most a signal can be localized in the Fourier domain is into rectangles of size $\Delta t \Delta f = 1$

The smallest possible $\Delta t \Delta f$ rectangle is called the *logon*, a “unit of information”

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Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

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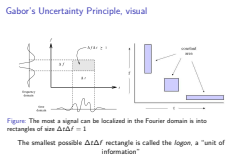


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Consequence of the Fourier transform

*In time-frequency analysis, it has been proven that linear operators cannot exceed the uncertainty bound [...] Nonlinearity does not by itself confer any acuity advantage, and in fact most nonlinearities are merely distortions and thus deleterious. However, by the above theorem, any carefully crafted analysis that can beat this limit must necessarily be nonlinear.*⁸

⁸ [Jacob Oppenheim and Marcelo Magnasco](#). “Human Time-Frequency Acuity Beats the Fourier Uncertainty Principle”. In: *Physical Review Letters* 110 (Aug. 2012). DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevLett.110.044301](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.110.044301).

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Time-frequency tradeoff, visual

Arises from the linearity of the Fourier transform

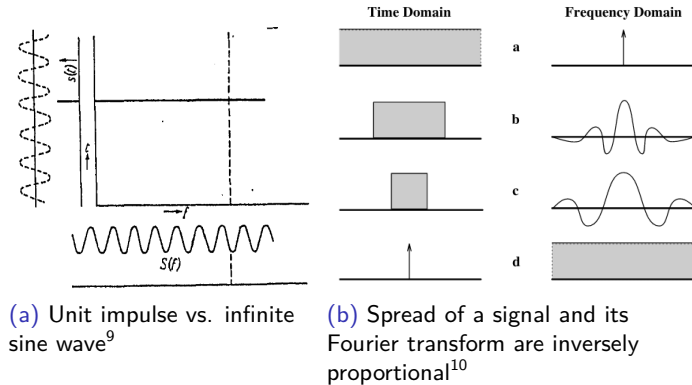


Figure: Time vs. frequency

⁹Dennis Gabor. "Theory of Communication". In: *Journal of Institution of Electrical Engineers* 93.3 (1946), pp. 429–457. URL: <http://www.granularsynthesis.com/pdf/gabor.pdf>.

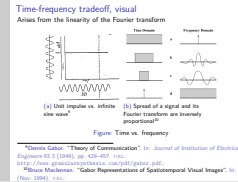
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Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

Time-frequency tradeoff, visual



Physical intuitions

The foregoing solutions [of the Fourier transform], though unquestionably mathematically correct, are somewhat difficult to reconcile with our physical intuitions and our physical concepts of such variable frequency mechanisms as, for instance, the siren

– Carson (quoted by Gabor)

Gabor came to the conclusion that the difficulty lay in our mutually exclusive formulations of time analysis and frequency analysis ... he suggested a new method of analyzing signals in which time and frequency play symmetrical parts.¹¹

¹¹A. Korpel. "Gabor: frequency, time, and memory". In: *Appl. Opt.* 21.20 (Oct. 1982), pp. 3624–3632. DOI: 10.1364/AO.21.003624. URL: <http://ao.osa.org/abstract.cfm?URI=ao-21-20-3624>.

2021-01-27

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└ Physical intuitions

- this points to the origin of the wavelet and searching for alternative, non-linear representations of time-domain signals

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Psychoacoustic¹² studies have shown that humans can exhibit a better time-frequency resolution than Gabor's limit:

We have conducted the first direct psychoacoustical test of the Fourier uncertainty principle in human hearing, by measuring simultaneous temporal and frequency discrimination. Our data indicate that human subjects often beat the bound prescribed by the uncertainty theorem, by factors in excess of 10.

Similarly to how Gabor was dissatisfied with time-frequency's inability to reconcile with physical intuitions:

most sound analysis and processing tools today continue to use models based on spectral theories. We believe it is time to revisit this issue.

¹² [Jacob Oppenheim and Marcelo Magnasco](#). "Human Time-Frequency Acuity Beats the Fourier Uncertainty Principle". In: *Physical Review Letters* 110 (Aug. 2012). DOI: [10.1103/PhysRevLett.110.044301](https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevLett.110.044301).

└ Psychoacoustics

- In fact its not a defeat of Gabor, its a justification that we need to find better representations – it actually supports the search for decompositions with non-linear components

Brian C. J. Moore in 1973:¹³

It is concluded that models based on a place (spectral) analysis should be subject to a limitation of the type $\Delta f \cdot d \geq \text{constant}$, where Δf is the frequency difference limen (DL) for a tone pulse of duration d . [...] It was found that at short durations the product of Δf and d was about one order of magnitude smaller than the minimum predicted from the place model

¹³B. C. J. Moore. "Frequency difference limens for short-duration tones". In: *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 54.3 (1973), pp. 610–619. DOI: 10.1121/1.1913640. eprint: <https://doi.org/10.1121/1.1913640>. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1121/1.1913640>.

└ Psychoacoustics

- frequency difference limen is similar to JND
- Consider that some psychoacoustic theories of hearing state that the cochlea does a tonotopic spectral decomposition, making it subject to the limitation

Gabor elementary functions

What is the shape of the signal for which the product $\Delta t \Delta f$ actually assumes the smallest possible value? [... it is] the modulation product of a harmonic oscillation of any frequency with a pulse of the form of the probability function

i.e. apply a Gaussian envelope to the signal

$$\psi(t) = e^{-\alpha^2(t-t_0)^2} \text{cis}(2\pi f_0 t + \phi)$$

$$\phi(f) = e^{-\frac{\pi}{\alpha^2}(f-f_0)^2} \text{cis}[-2\pi(f-f_0) + \phi]$$

The constant α is connected with Δt and Δf as follows:

$$\Delta t = \sqrt{\frac{\pi}{2}} \frac{1}{\alpha}, \Delta f = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2\pi}} \alpha$$

2021-01-27

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Gabor elementary functions

- probability function = Gaussian
- Gaussian envelope of the finite-duration time signal

Gabor elementary functions

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Gabor elementary functions, alternative form

Alternate form in Bruce MacLennan. "Gabor Representations of Spatiotemporal Visual Images". In: (Nov. 1994). URL: <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~matilde/GaborLocalization.pdf>:

$$\begin{aligned}C_{jk}(t) &= \exp[-\pi(t - j\Delta t)^2/\alpha^2] \cos[2\pi k\Delta f(t - j\Delta t)], \\S_{jk}(t) &= \exp[-\pi(t - j\Delta t)^2/\alpha^2] \sin[2\pi k\Delta f(t - j\Delta t)], \\ \phi_{jk} &= C_{jk} + iS_{jk}\end{aligned}$$

As $\alpha \rightarrow \infty$, this reduces to the Fourier representation:

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As $\alpha \rightarrow 0$, this reduces to Dirac delta functions spaced at Δt :

$$\begin{aligned}\phi_{jk}(t) &= \delta(t - j\Delta t) + i\delta(t - j\Delta t), \\C_{jk}(t) &= S_{jk}(t) = \delta(t - j\Delta t).\end{aligned}$$

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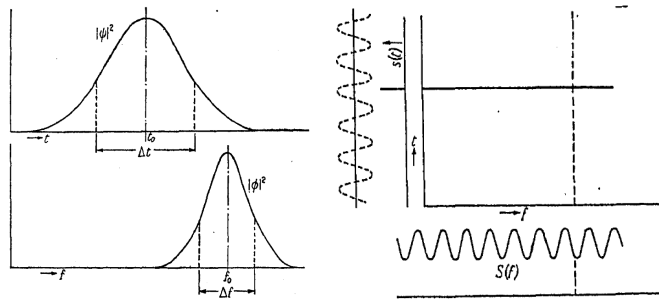
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- absolute localization in frequency, no time information
- absolute localization in time, no frequency information

Gabor elementary functions

The parameter α determines the locality (spread) of the Gaussian envelope



(a) Envelope of the elementary signal

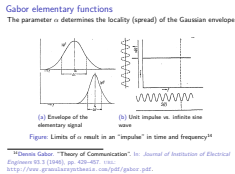
(b) Unit impulse vs. infinite sine wave

Figure: Limits of α result in an “impulse” in time and frequency¹⁴

¹⁴Dennis Gabor. “Theory of Communication”. In: *Journal of Institution of Electrical Engineers* 93.3 (1946), pp. 429–457. URL: <http://www.granularsynthesis.com/pdf/gabor.pdf>.

Gabor’s 1946 Theory of Communication

└ Gabor elementary functions



2021-01-27

Relation to Shannon's 1948 Sampling Theorem

Most important outcome of Shannon's seminal communications paper¹⁵ in 1948, the Sampling Theorem, states that “to reconstruct ψ we must take equally spaced samples at a minimum of the Nyquist frequency, which is twice the maximal frequency”¹⁶

Recall that in Gabor's representation, as $\alpha \rightarrow 0$, this reduces to Dirac delta functions spaced at Δt :

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The $\alpha = 0$ limit represents two samples, a_{jk}, b_{jk} for each Δt interval, as required by Shannon's Sampling Theorem.

¹⁵C. E. Shannon. “A mathematical theory of communication”. In: *The Bell System Technical Journal* 27.3 (1948), pp. 379–423. DOI: 10.1002/j.1538-7305.1948.tb01338.x.

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Relation to Shannon's 1948 Sampling Theorem

- this is the simpler of the two, read full paper for the other

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Gaussian window

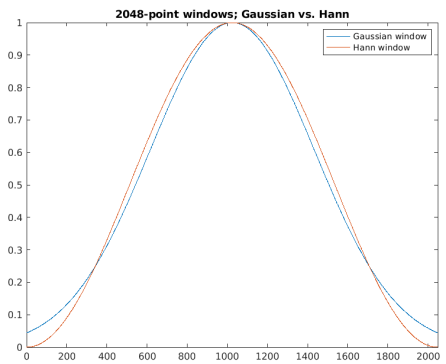


Figure: gausswin and hann windows in MATLAB

Note that Hann window is exactly 0 outside of the specified range
Gaussian asymptotically approaches 0 but never reaches it

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Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

└ Gaussian window

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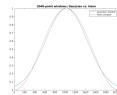


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Problems with the Gabor functions

Summarized from MacLennan, “Gabor Representations of Spatiotemporal Visual Images”

- 1 The Gabor functions are **not strictly local** – along with their infinite Gaussian envelope, they stretch out to infinity
Biologically problematic, but the Gaussian envelope is well-localized (99.7% of its area is within 3 standard deviations of the mean), so can be a “good enough approximation” of biology
- 2 The Gabor representation is **nonorthogonal**. This means computing the coefficients is *possible* but not with the simple inner product. Inner products can lead to a good estimation of the Gabor coefficients with iterative refinement (Daugman’s 1993 algorithm¹⁷)

Daugman unified Gabor elementary functions and wavelets by defining Gabor wavelets

¹⁷J. G. Daugman. “High confidence visual recognition of persons by a test of statistical independence”. In: *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence* 15.11 (1993), pp. 1148–1161. DOI: 10.1109/34.244676.

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Problems with the Gabor functions

3 Despite being nonorthogonal in $L_2(\mathbb{R})$, they can **still be a frame**¹⁸

However, the requirements of orthogonality and the basis property are very stringent, making it difficult as a rule to find a good orthonormal basis. As an alternative to orthonormal bases, we present a generalization known as frames.

Also:

Nonorthogonality is ubiquitous in biological systems – we should learn how nature lives with it and even exploits it [...] orthogonality is a rather delicate property – functions either are or aren't orthogonal; there are no degrees of orthogonality – and so it is probably too fragile for biology to be able to depend on it.

¹⁸Christopher Heil and David Walnut. "Continuous and discrete wavelet transforms. SIAM Review, 31, 628-666". In: *SIAM Review* 31 (Dec. 1989), pp. 628–666. DOI: 10.1137/1031129.

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for further reading

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Time-frequency resolution in the STFT

Using default MATLAB spectrogram parameters¹⁹ (Hamming window)

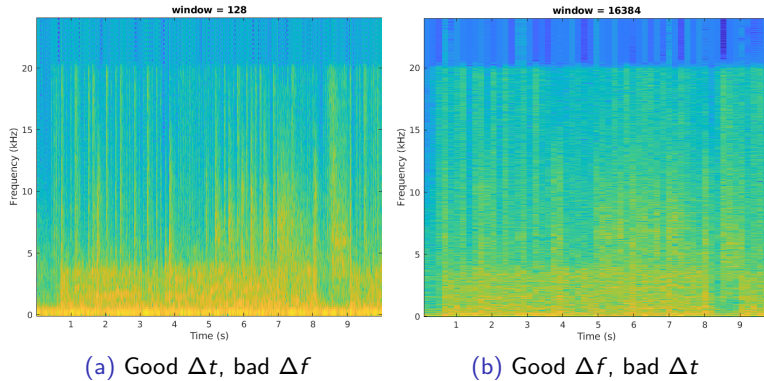


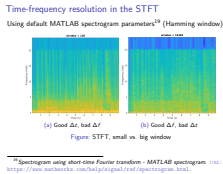
Figure: STFT, small vs. big window

¹⁹Spectrogram using short-time Fourier transform - MATLAB spectrogram. URL: <https://www.mathworks.com/help/signal/ref/spectrogram.html>.

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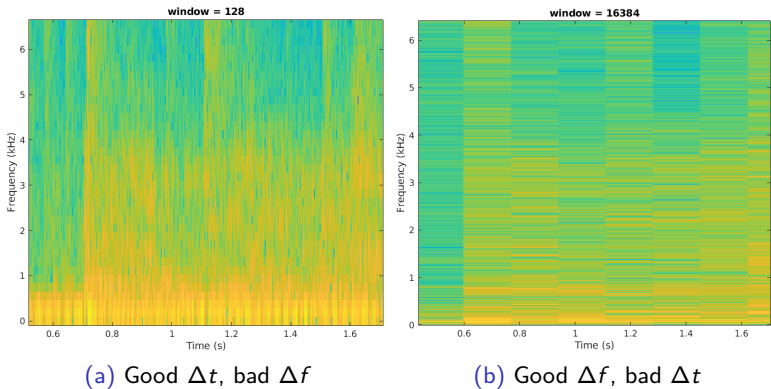
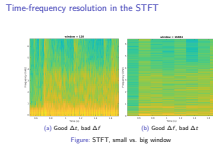


Figure: STFT, small vs. big window

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Time-frequency resolution in the STFT



STFT with gausswin (i.e. Gabor transform)

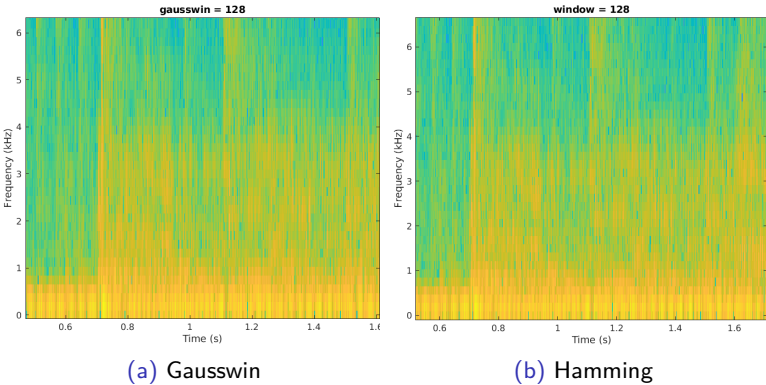
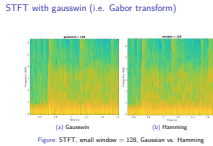


Figure: STFT, small window = 128, Gaussian vs. Hamming

2021-01-27

Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

└ STFT with gausswin (i.e. Gabor transform)



STFT with gausswin (i.e. Gabor transform)

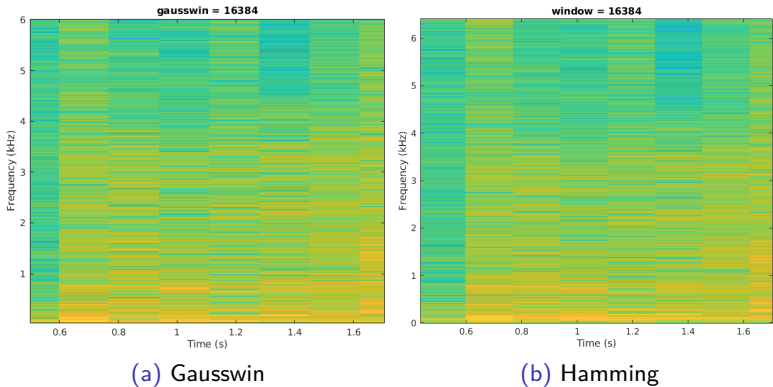


Figure: STFT, large window = 16384, Gaussian vs. Hamming

2021-01-27

Gabor's 1946 Theory of Communication

└ STFT with gausswin (i.e. Gabor transform)

