Separated Spacecraft Interferometry

Oliver Lay

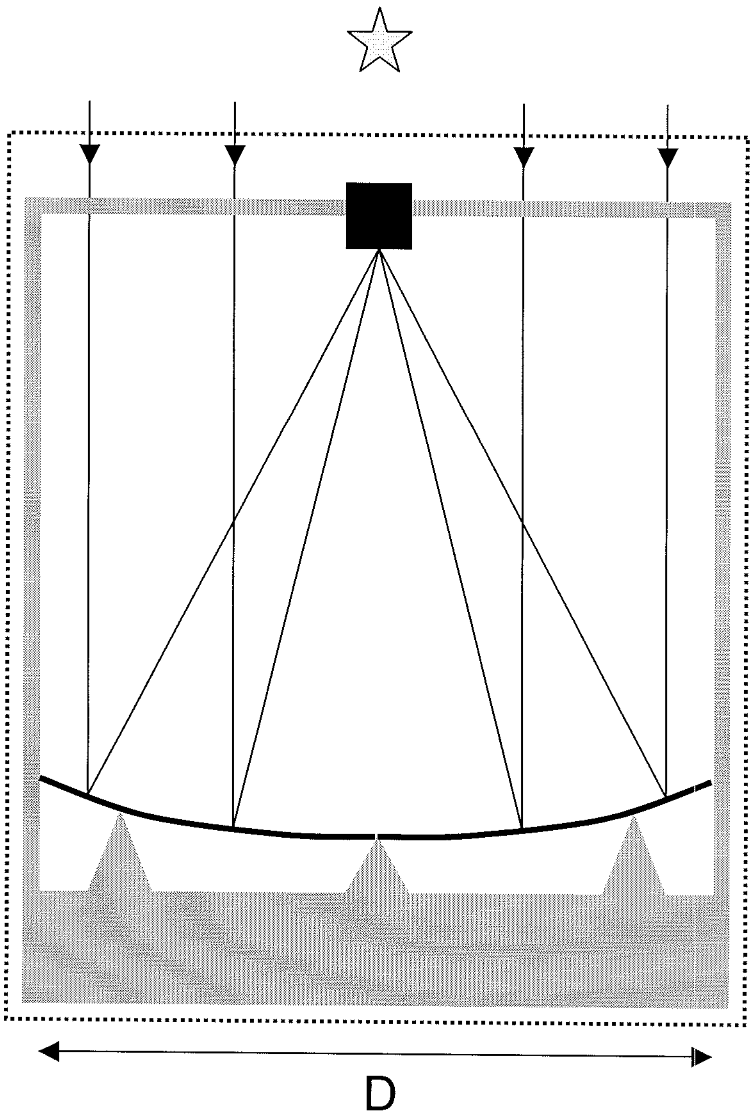
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology

Outline

- Formation telescopes
- Configurations
- Orbits
- Formation flying
- Beam shear
- Acquisition
- Delay and delay rate
- UV-coverage
- Future formation flying missions

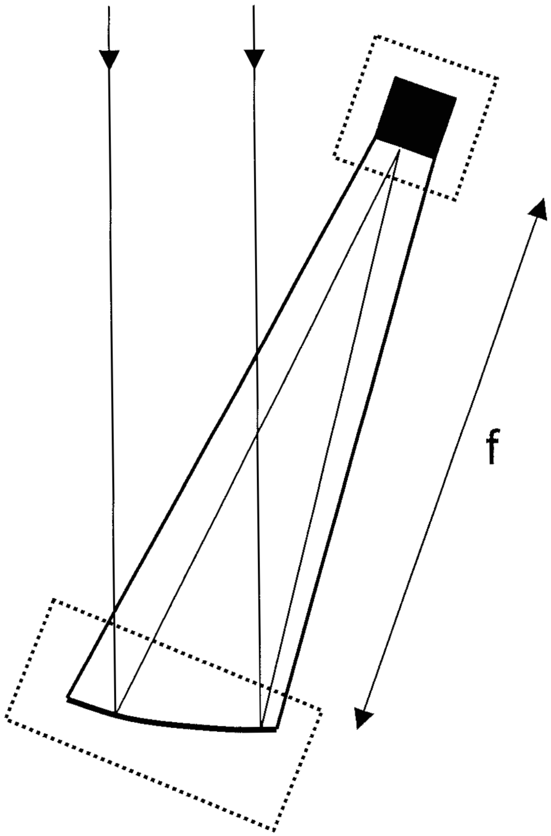
  - Covers many technologies
  - Highlight differences between ground and separated spacecraft
  - Knowledge of basic interferometry assumed

Monolithic telescope

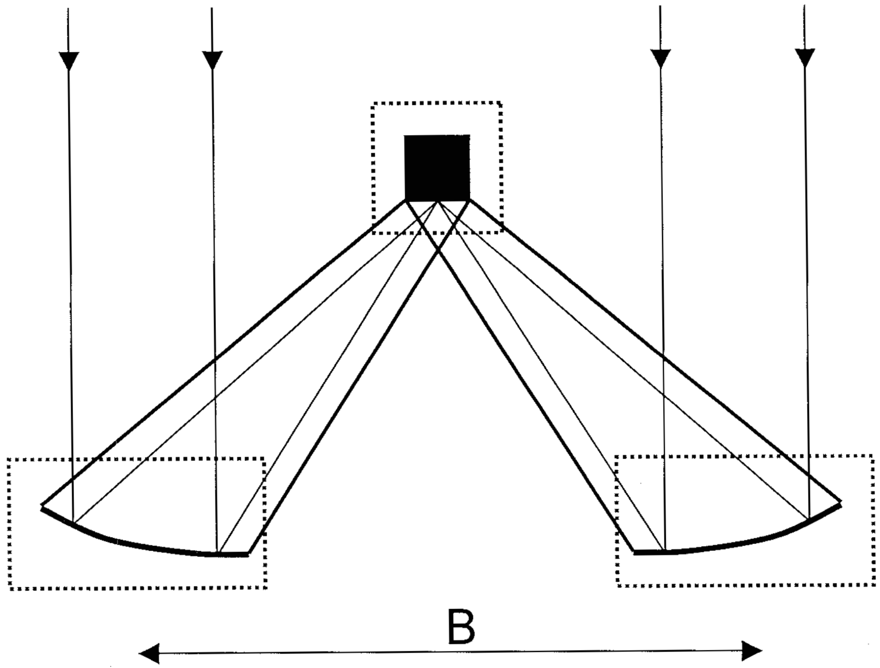


- Angular resolution ~ λ / D
- Collecting area ~ D^2
- Must maintain equal path lengths from target to focal plane
- Path lengths stabilized by rigid structure
- Single spacecraft platform limits dimensions

Formation telescope examples



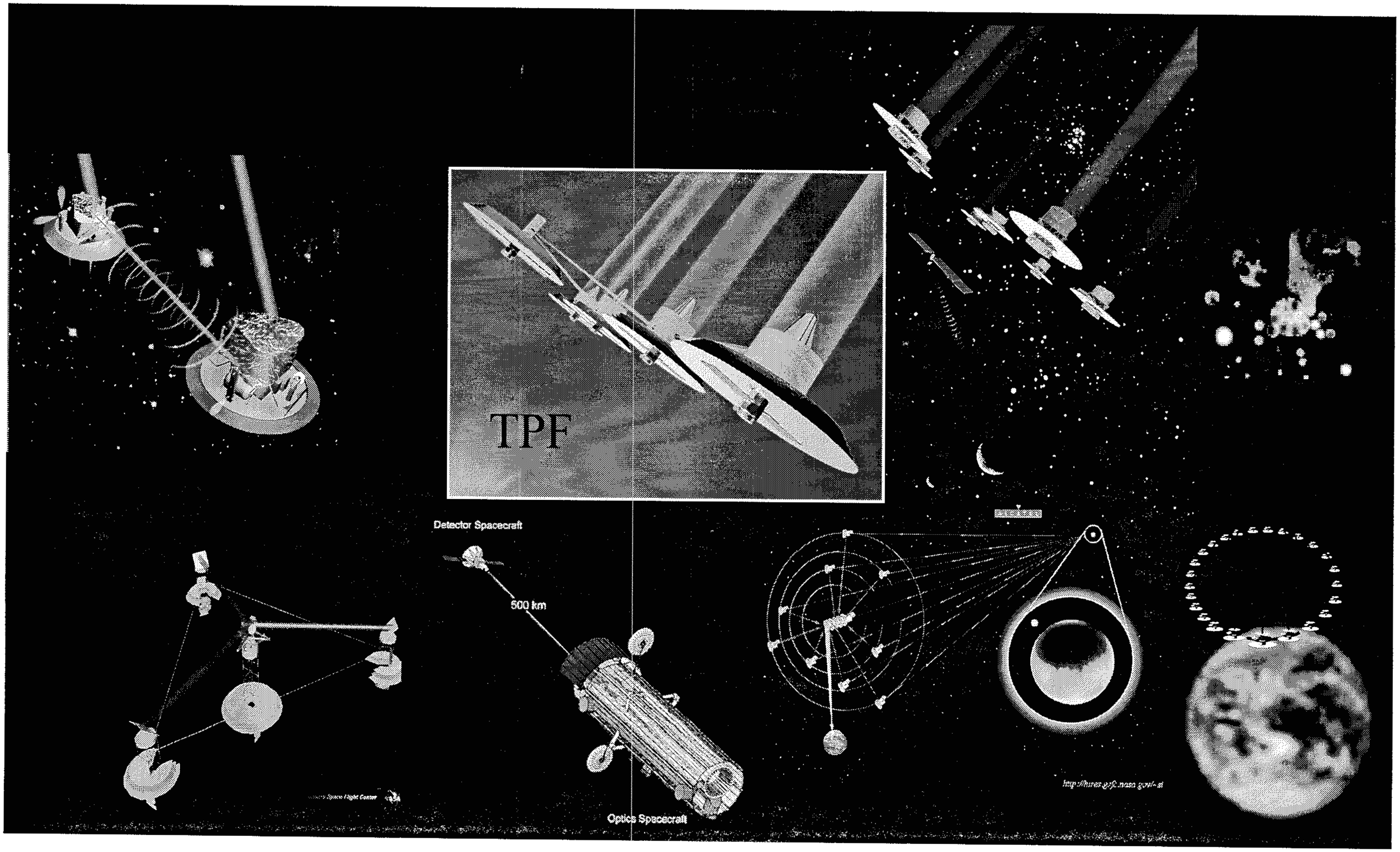
Large area, low curvature membrane reflector requires long focal length



Interferometer has angular resolution ~ λ / B

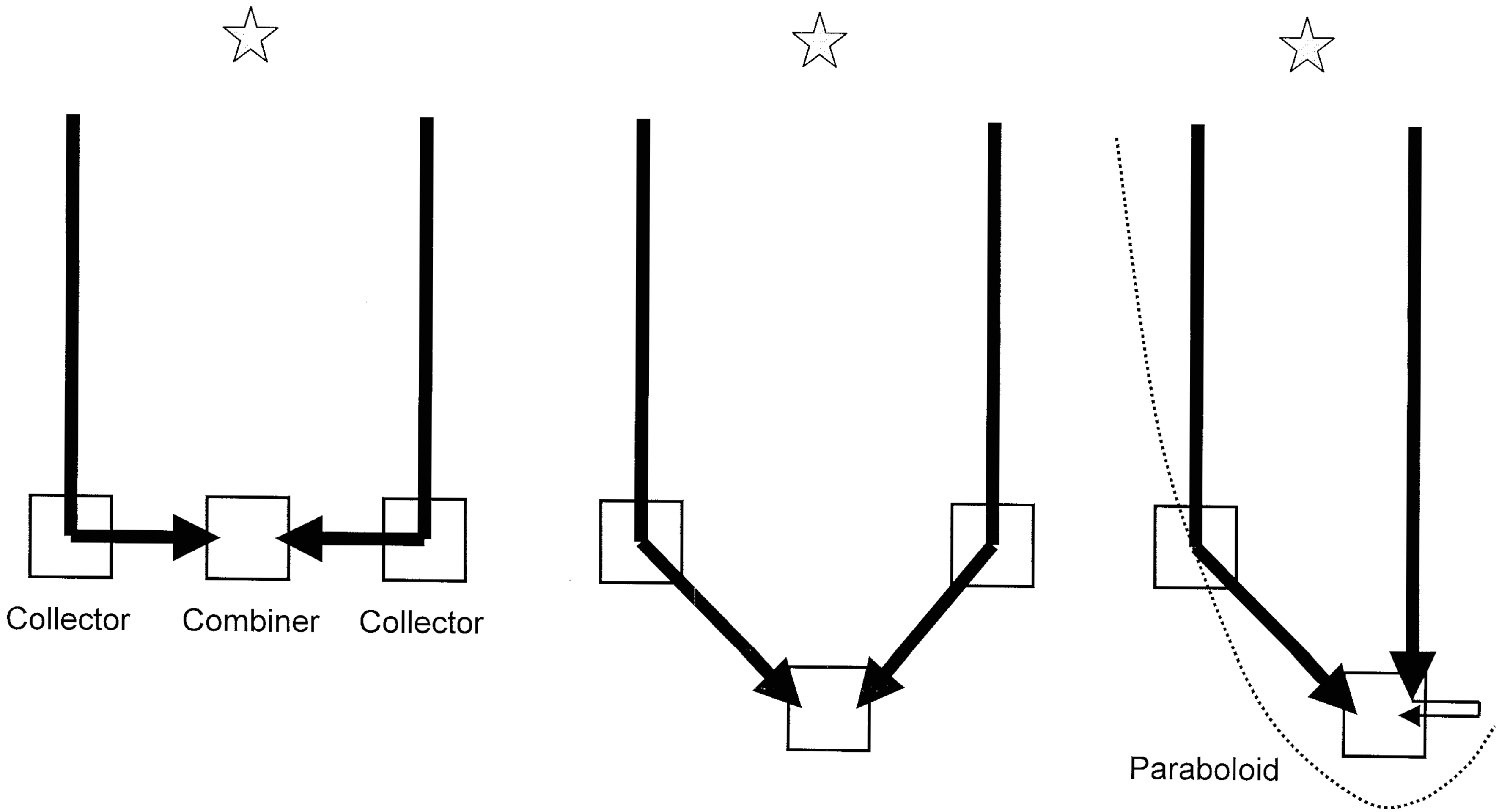
- Path lengths stabilized by laser metrology & actuators
- Replace steel beams with metrology beams

Formation Telescopes II



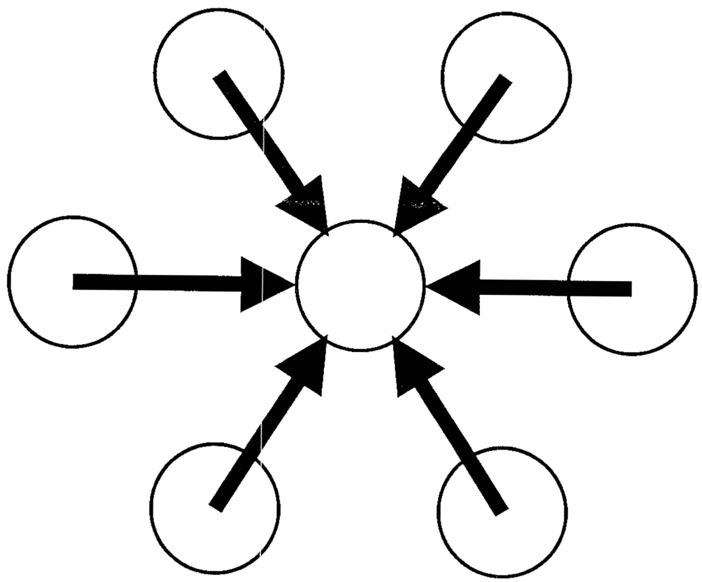
Configurations I

- Balancing path lengths is primary issue



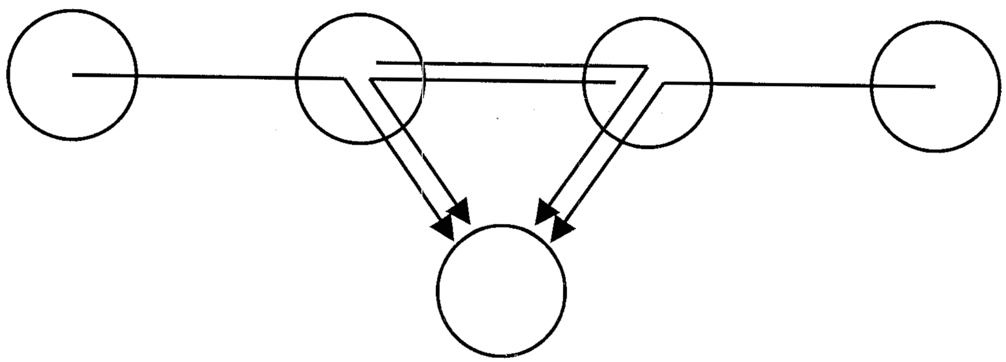
Configurations II

- DARWIN

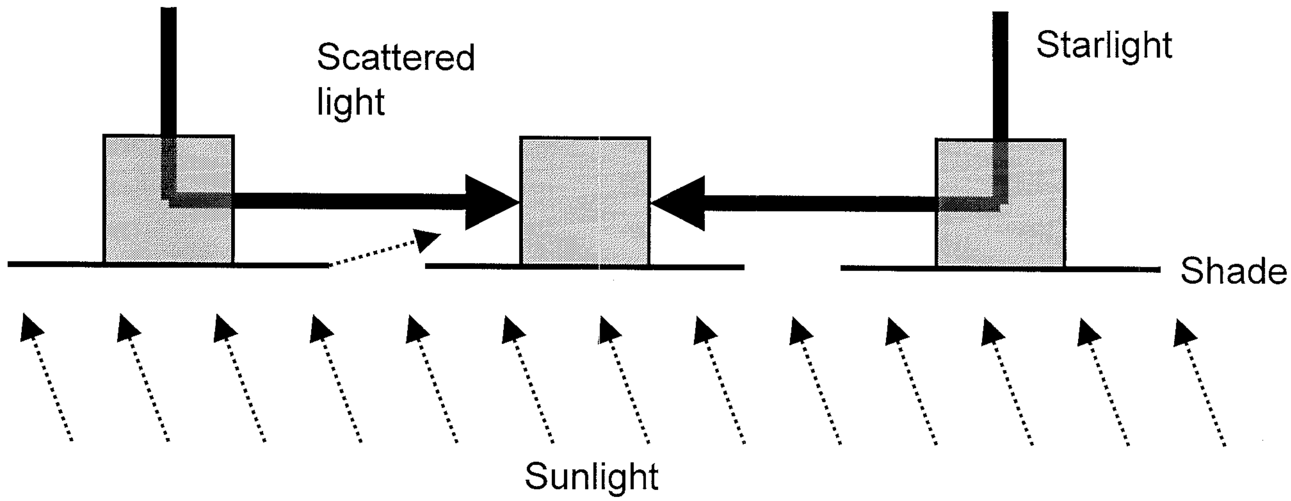


Target star direction is normal to plane of figure

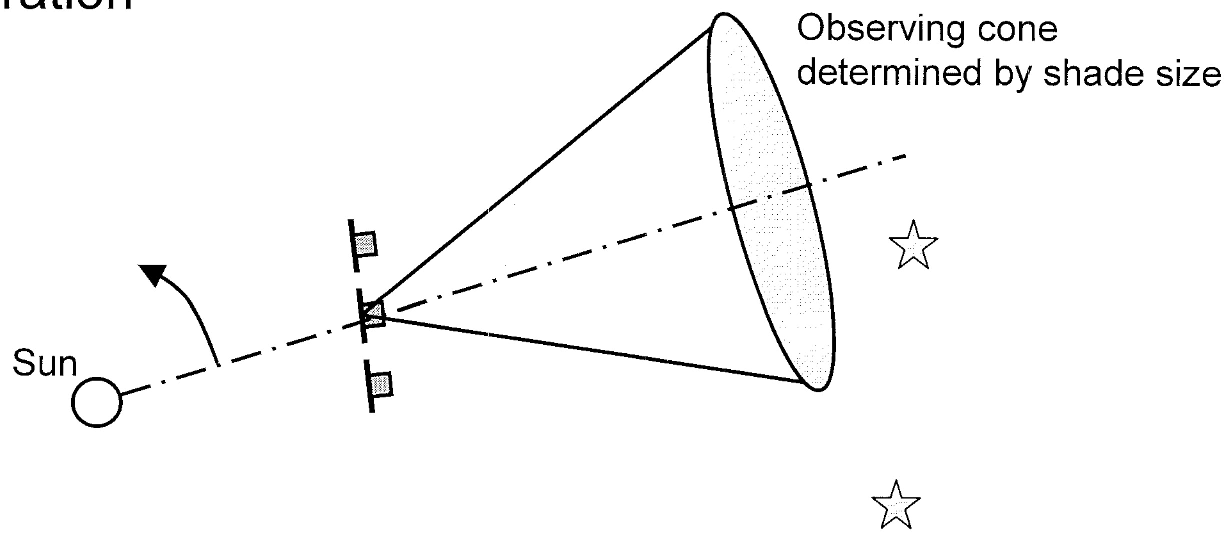
- TPF



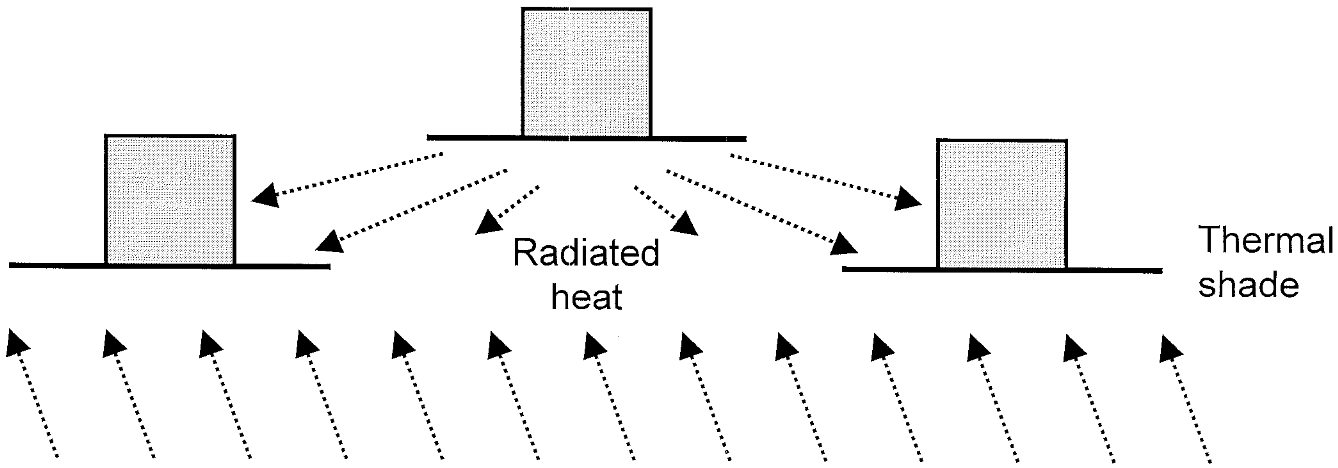
Shading concerns I



- Restricted to parts of sky in general anti-sun direction with this configuration



Shading concerns II

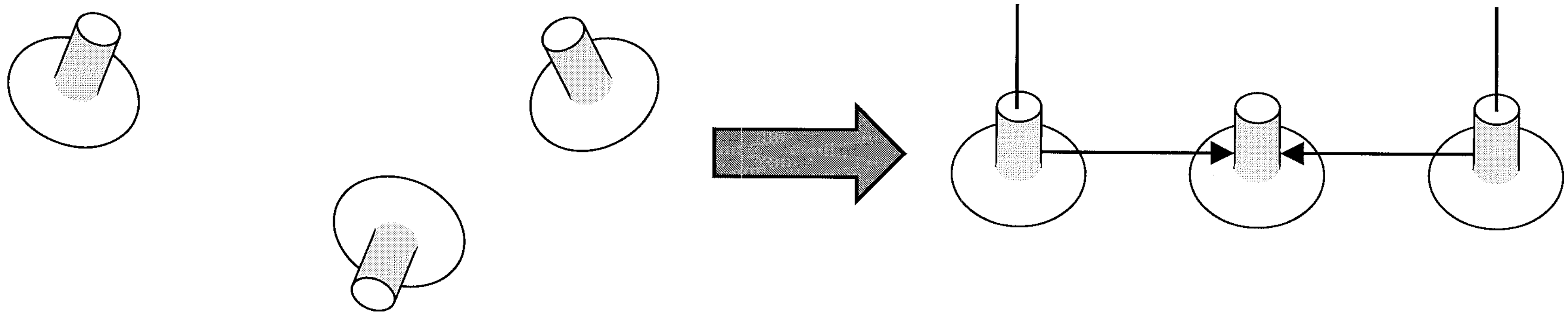


- Interferometers operating in mid and far IR need to be kept cold. Planar configurations better:

Orbits

Orbit type	Pros	Cons
Earth orbit	•Cheaper launch •Serviceable	•Strong gravity gradients •Night and day
1 AU heliocentric (Earth trailing / leading)	•Good solar power •Easier communication •Multiple launches possible	•Not serviceable •Harder to cool
5 AU heliocentric	•Easier to cool •Lower zodiacal dust emission	•Not serviceable •Less solar power available •Multiple launches difficult •Harder communciation
L2		

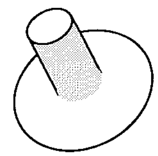
Forming an optically stable platform



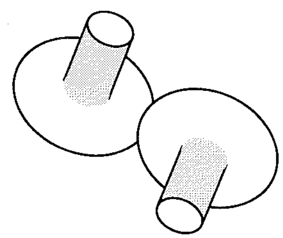
- Key elements:
  - Formation flying
    - Sensors
    - Actuators
    - Algorithms
  - Beam shear
  - Control loops

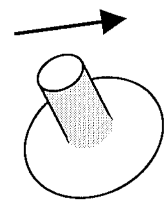
Formation Flying Sensors

- Standard sensors
  - Star-trackers: inertial attitude to ~arcsec level
  - Gyros: inertial attitude rate
  - Accelerometers: inertial velocity changes



- Formation sensor functions
  - Collision avoidance
  - Formation "evaporation"
  - Acquisition

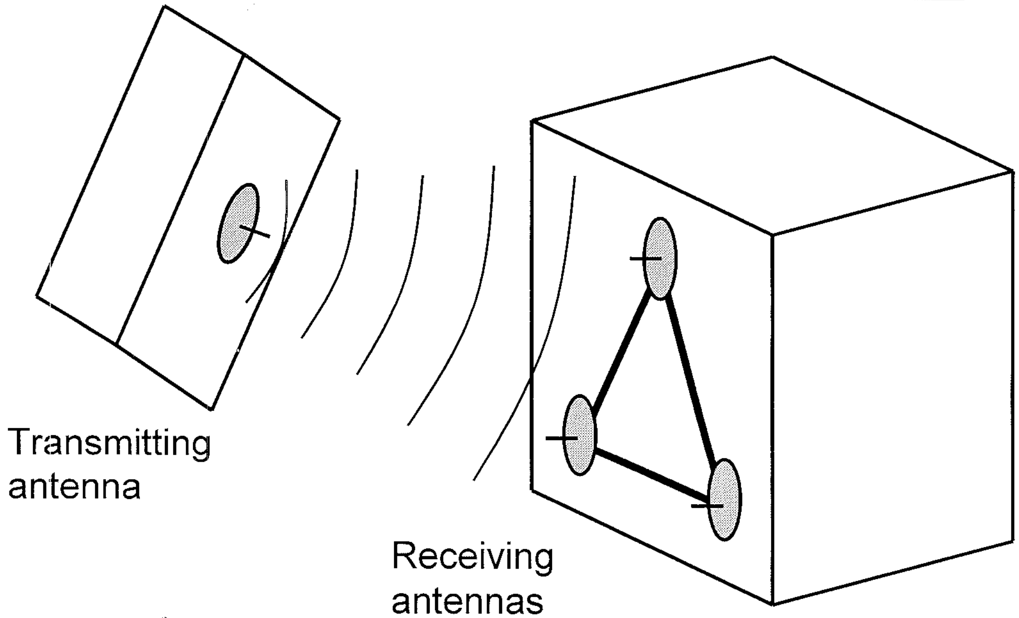




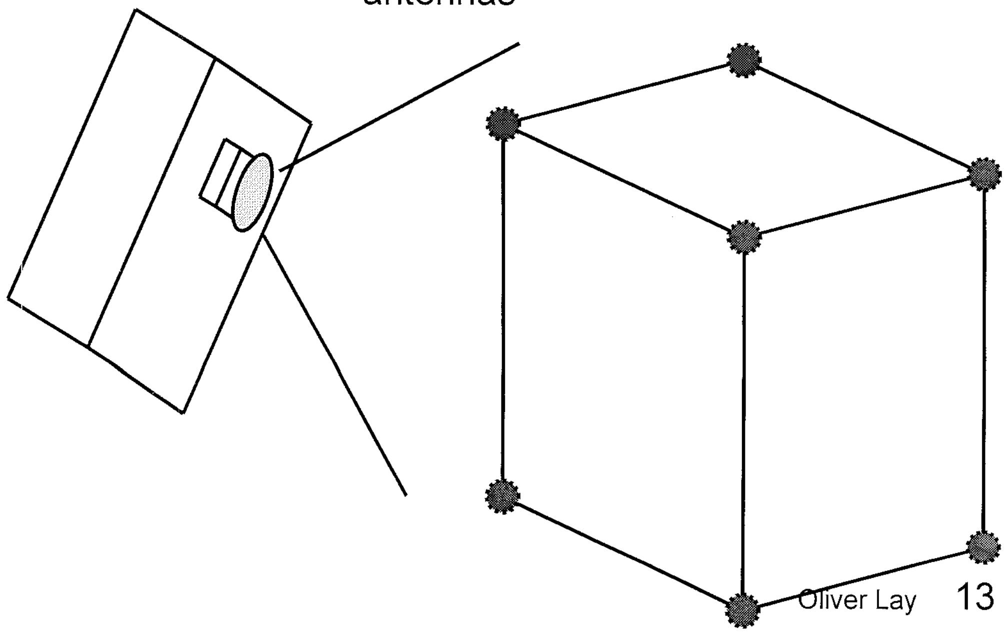
- Requirements
  - Relative range and bearing angles
  - 4π steradian coverage
  - Separations from few meters to km or more
  - Must function in arbitrary configurations

Coarse formation sensing

- RF
  - Bearing from differential arrival time
  - Range from propagation time
  - 4π coverage requires many antennas
  - Complicated by shades & structures



- Optical
  - Wide-angle cameras looking for beacons on other spacecraft
  - Ranging difficult
  - Beacons compete with sun and illuminated parts of spacecraft



Formation flying actuators

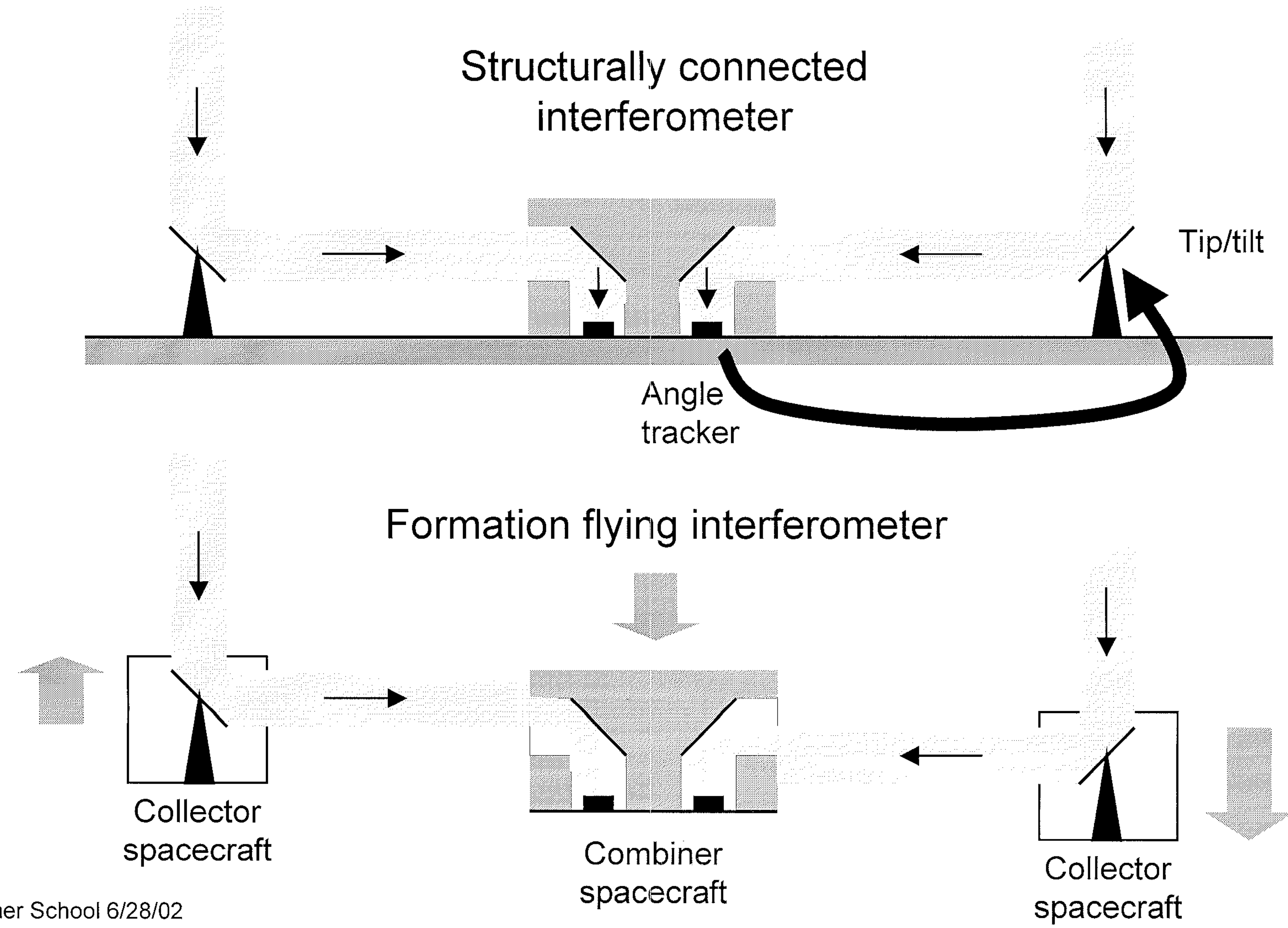
Actuator	Description	Pros	Cons
Thrusters	Many types available. E.g. chemical, cold gas, Pulsed Plasma Thrusters (PPT), Field Emission Effect Propulsion System (FEEPS)	•Can provide attitude and translation control •Micro-newton thrusts possible	•Consumable propellant •Contamination of optical surfaces •Plumes
Reaction wheels	Electrically driven wheels. Wheel spun up one way, spacecraft turns the other way.	•Established technology	•No translation control •Source of vibration
Tethers	Cables connecting spacecraft which can be paid out or pulled in to control separation	•Saves fuel •Prevents "evaporation"	•Still need thrusters for control •Tether management issues •Source of stray light
Electro-magnets	Powerful electromagnets on each spacecraft provide mutual attraction/repulsion (see: cdio-prime.mit.edu/CDIO3/References/MagFF.pdf)	•Saves fuel •No contamination	•Currently just a concept
Solar sails	Forces generated by momentum of solar photons impinging on large reflective sails	•Saves fuel •No contamination	•Very immature •Low thrust

Formation flying algorithms

- Must be semi-autonomous
  - No continuous link to ground
  - System on its own for hours at a time
- Must be extremely reliable
  - Prevent collisions and evaporation events over years of remote operation, sometimes in very tight formations
  - Robust to many possible failure modes
- Constraints
  - Avoid collision courses
  - Maintain shading and solar power
  - Optimize fuel used vs time taken
  - Balance fuel consumption between spacecraft
  - Prevent impingement of thruster plumes

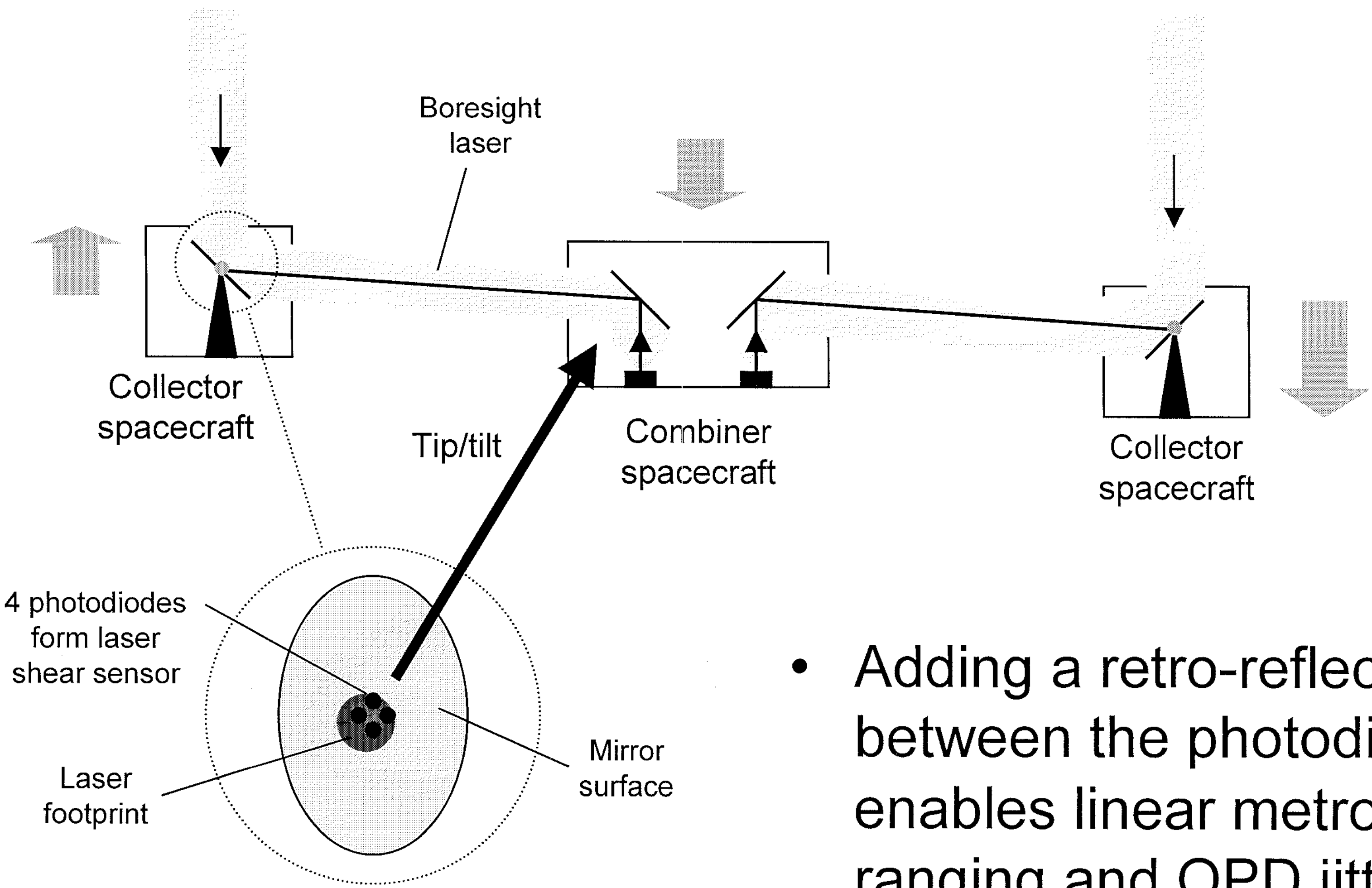
Beam shear I

- Key difference between fixed structure and FFI



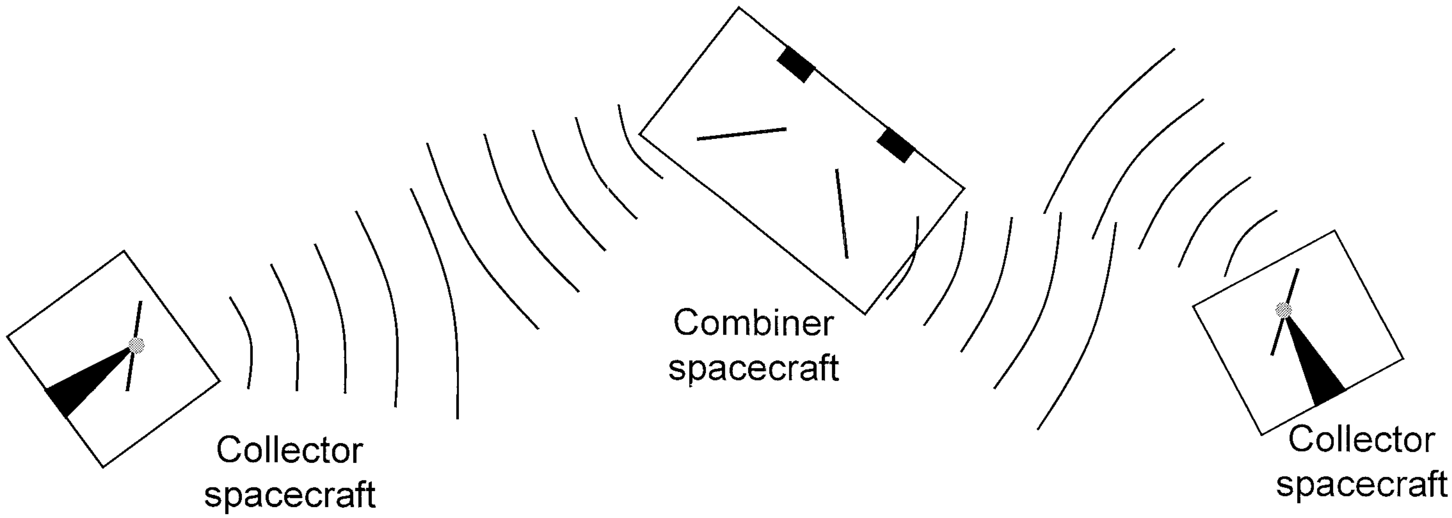
Beam shear II

- One solution:



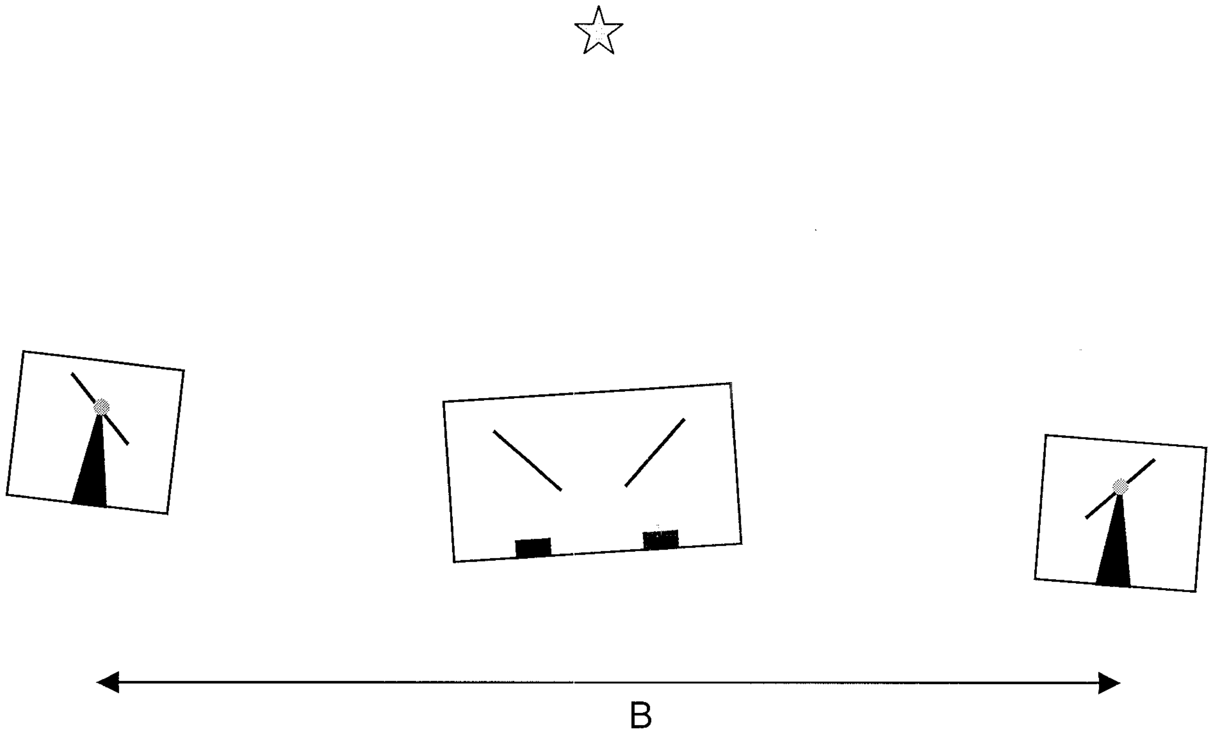
- Adding a retro-reflector between the photodiodes enables linear metrology: ranging and OPD jitter

Acquisition sequence: 1. Free floating



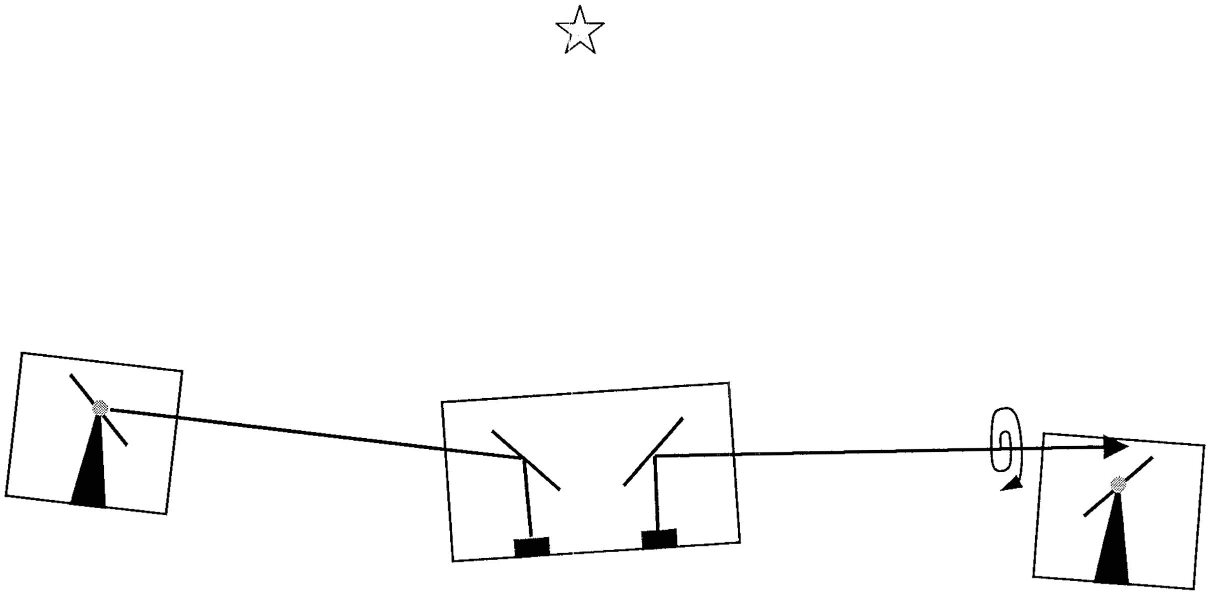
- Coarse formation sensing to determine relative locations

2. Rough formation



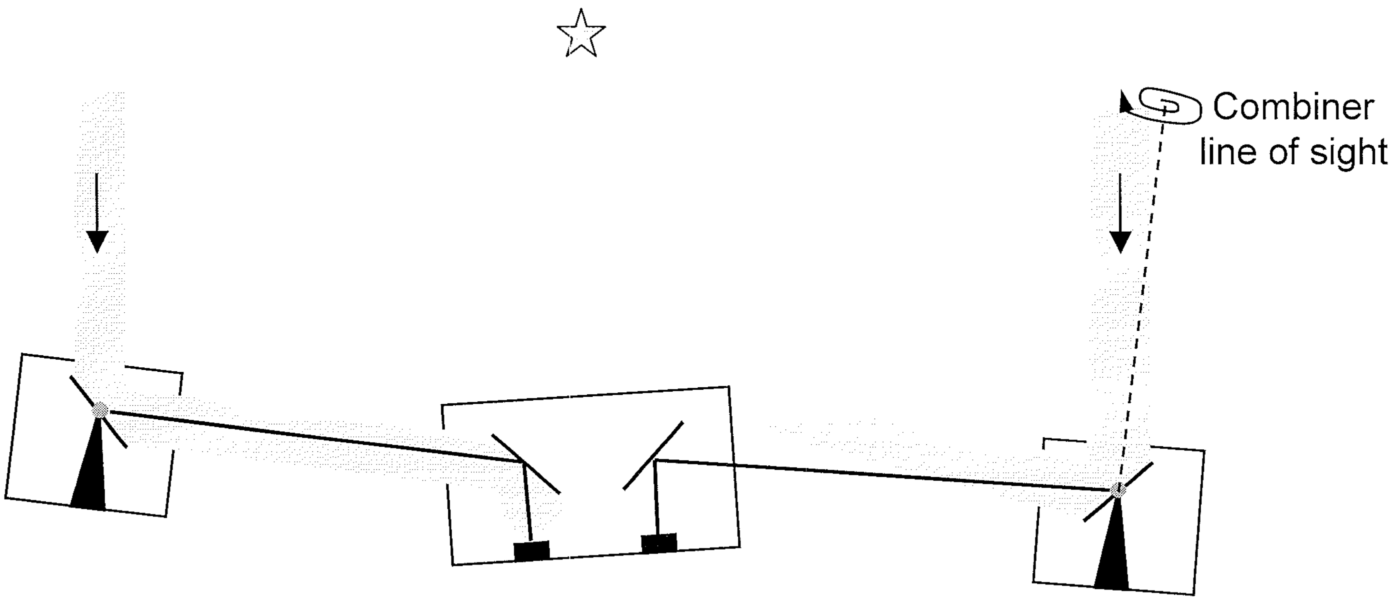
- FF algorithm commands thrusters to position spacecraft with desired baseline length and orientation relative to target

3. Metrology acquisition



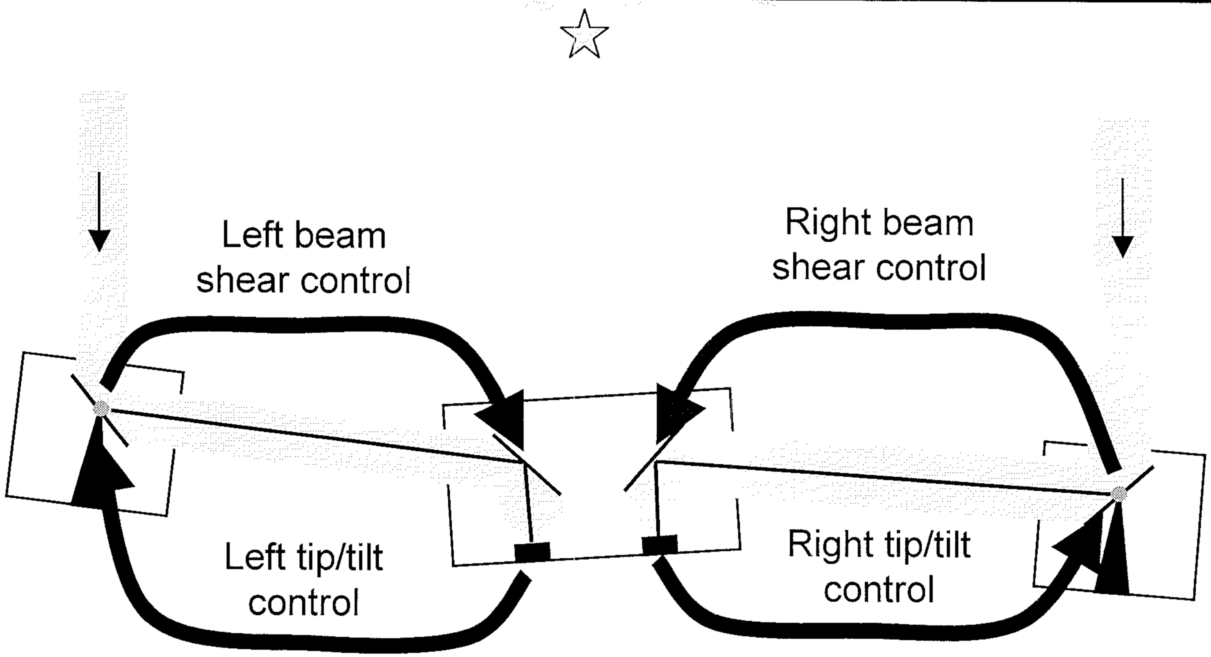
- Approximate bearing from coarse formation sensors
- Spiral search until metrology shear sensor acquired
- Control loop closed between metrology shear sensor and combiner tip/tilt mirror

4. StarLight acquisition



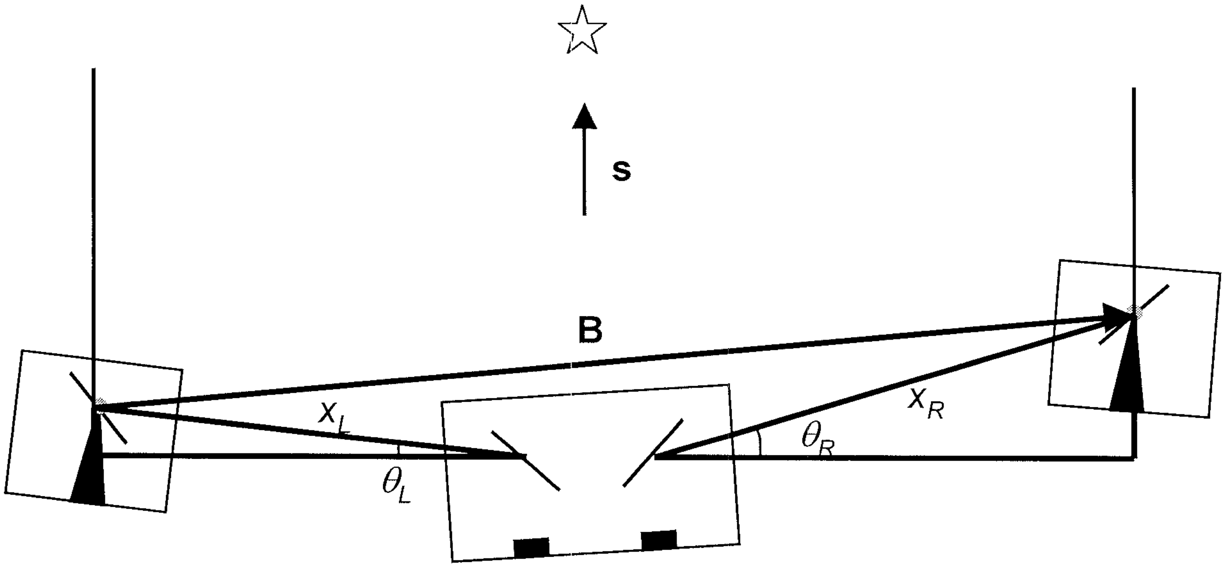
- Collector tip/tilt mirror scanned until starlight beam enters combiner optics and appears in detector field of view
- Or, equivalently, the combiner line of sight is being scanned on the sky until it points towards the target
- Starting position for search determined from readings from startrackers and tip/tilt mirrors

Station-keeping control



- Spacecraft continually moving:
  - Solar radiation pressure
  - Gravity gradients
  - Non-zero minimum thrust
- Control loops maintain angle tracking and beam shear
- Allowed motion determined by
  - range of tip/tilt mirrors
  - observing constraints
  - length of active delay line
- Next step: finding fringes

Delay uncertainty



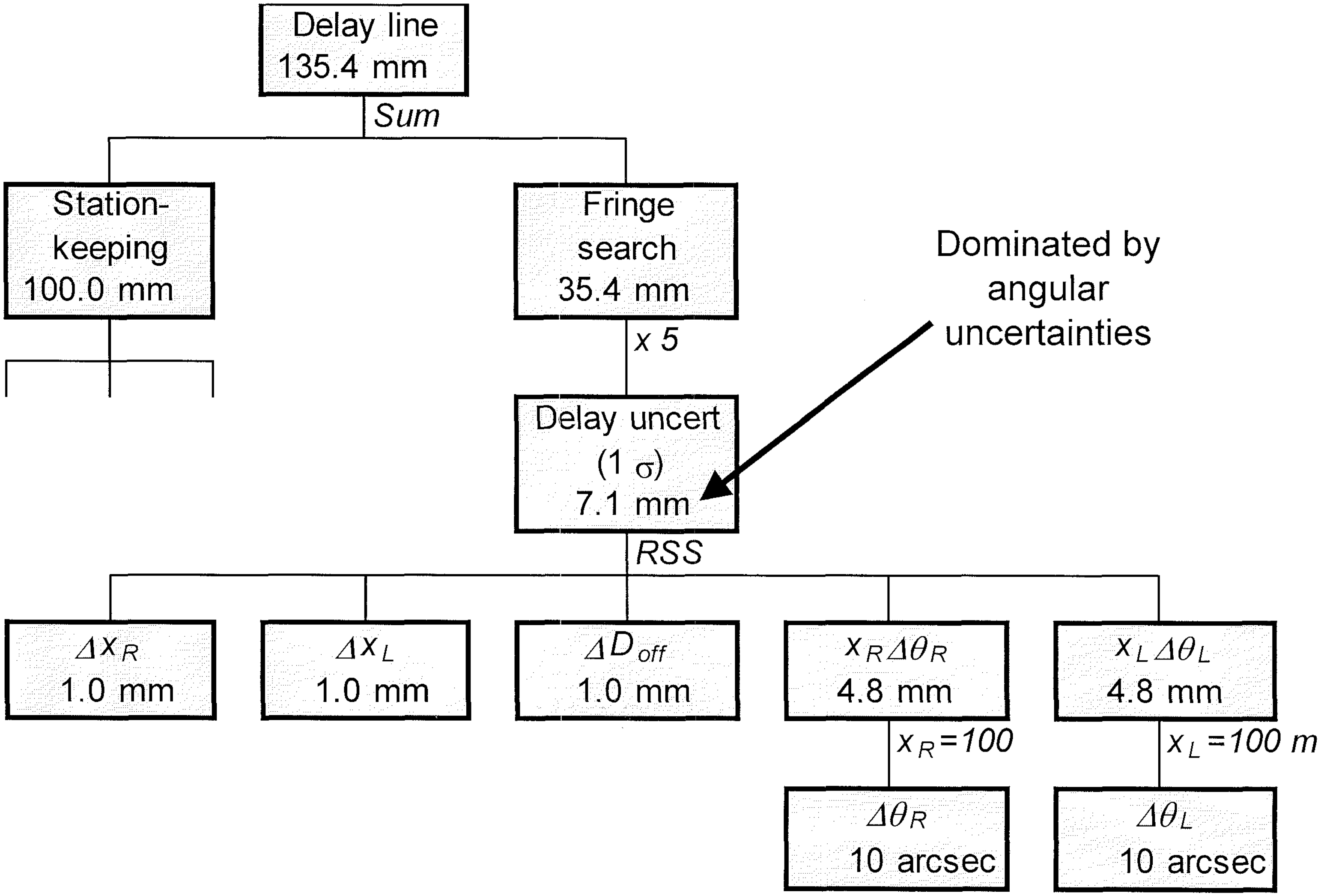
$$D = D_{\text{ext}} - D_{\text{int}}$$
$$= (\mathbf{B} \bullet \mathbf{S}) - (x_L - x_R - D_{\text{off}})$$

- Ground-based systems:
  - x_L & x_R fixed
  - Length of **B** fixed
  - Direction of **B** well-known

- Delay error for this config:

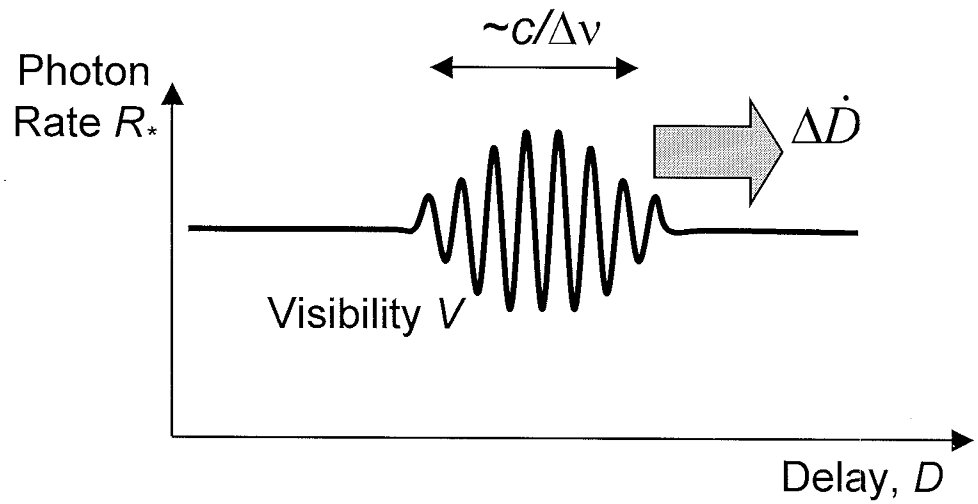
$$\Delta D \simeq \underbrace{\Delta x_R - \Delta x_L}_{\text{Ranging}} + \underbrace{\Delta D_{\text{off}}}_{\text{Internal metrology}} \underbrace{- x_R \Delta\theta_R + x_L \Delta\theta_L}_{\text{Angular metrology}}$$

Delay line allocation example



Delay rate uncertainty & fringe search sensitivity

$$\Delta\dot{D} \simeq \Delta\dot{x}_R - \Delta\dot{x}_L + \Delta\dot{D}_{\text{off}} - x_R\Delta\dot{\theta}_R + x_L\Delta\dot{\theta}_L \simeq x_L\Delta\dot{\theta}_L - x_R\Delta\dot{\theta}_R$$



Dwell time on fringe:

$$T \lesssim \frac{\text{fringe envelope width}}{\text{delay rate uncertainty}}$$

$$\lesssim c\left(x\Delta\nu\sqrt{2}\sigma_{\dot{\theta}}\right)^{-1}$$

where $x \sim x_L \sim x_R$

Fringe detection SNR for 1 spectral channel $\Delta\nu$

$$SNR_1 \sim \frac{R_* T V}{\sqrt{R_* + r^2}} \sim \frac{cV\sqrt{R_*}}{x\Delta\nu\sqrt{2}\sigma_{\dot{\theta}}}$$

neglecting detector read noise contribution r

For n spectral channels

$$SNR_n \simeq \sqrt{n}\left(SNR_1\right)$$

$$\sim \frac{cV\sqrt{n}\sqrt{R_*}}{x\Delta\nu\sqrt{2}\sigma_{\dot{\theta}}} = \frac{cV\sqrt{R_{*,tot}}}{x\Delta\nu\sqrt{2}\sigma_{\dot{\theta}}}$$

Example sensitivity calculation

- Optical interferometer with 200 m baseline (x = 100 m)
- 10 spectral channels in the range 0.5 – 1.0 μm ($\Delta\nu$ = 3 x 10^{13} Hz)
- Uncertainty in angle rates = 10 milliarcsec / s = 50 nrad / s
- Fringe visibility V = 0.5
- SNR for fringe detection = 5

$$SNR_n \sim \frac{cV\sqrt{R_{*,tot}}}{x\Delta\nu\sqrt{2}\sigma_{\dot{\theta}}}$$

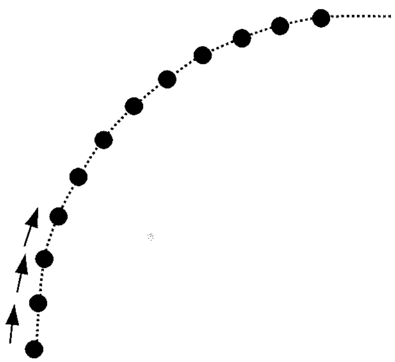
- Then require total photon rate $R_{*,tot} \sim 50 / s$
- If 2 apertures of diameter 1 m, and 10% of photons reach detector,
- then required photon flux ~ 320 photons / m^2 in total bandwidth of 3 x 10^{14} Hz
- Magnitude 0 star gives approx 10^{-4} photons / s / m^2 / Hz
- giving limiting magnitude for fringe detection ~ 20

Fringe tracking and measurement

- Basic principles same as for ground-based systems
- But different disturbance environment:
  - No atmospheric phase fluctuations
  - No earth rotation
  - Station-keeping maneuvers
  - Vibrations dominated by interferometer actuators
    - Tip/tilt mirrors
    - Delay lines
    - Thruster firings

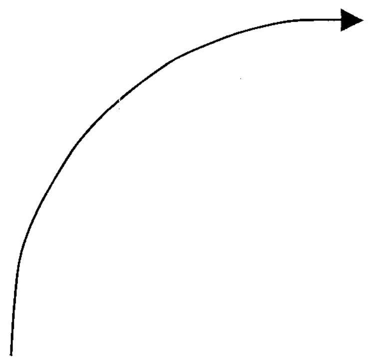
UV-coverage

- Stop-and-Stare observing



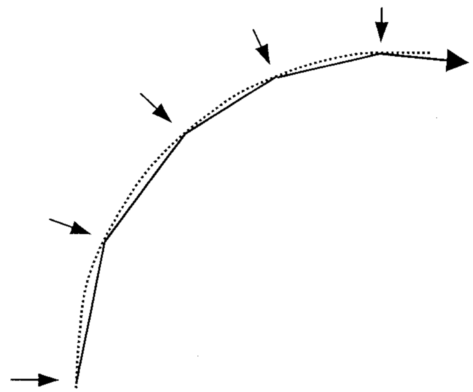
- Consumes more fuel
- Takes longer
- More stable observing environment

- On-the-fly observing, continuous control



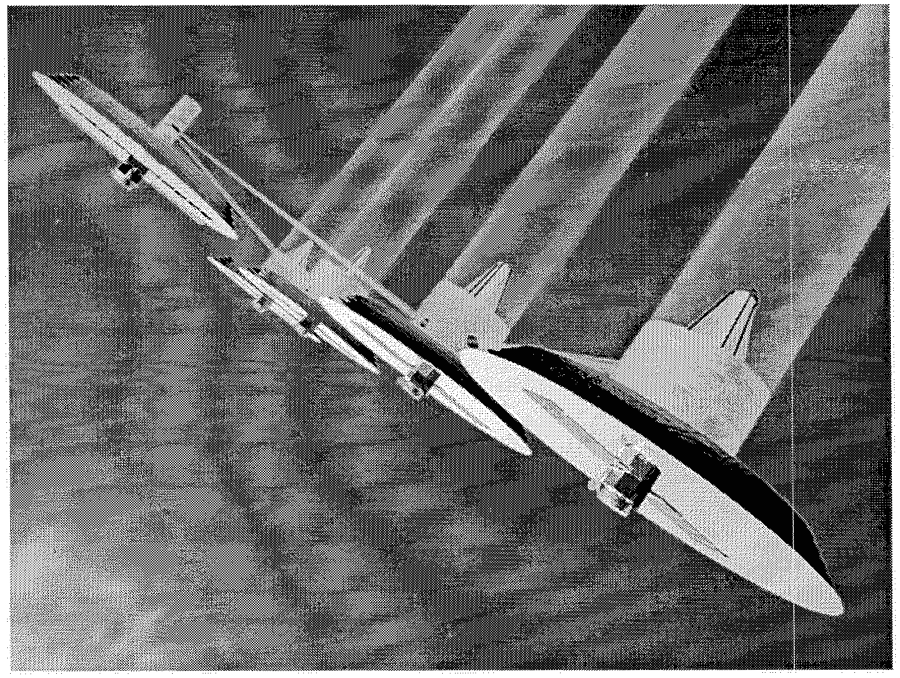
- Continuous disturbance
- Minimal requirement on delay line length

- On-the-fly observing, bang-bang control



- Discrete thruster firings
- Quiet drift periods
- Settling time after each firing
- Delay line needed for non-ideal path

Terrestrial Planet Finder



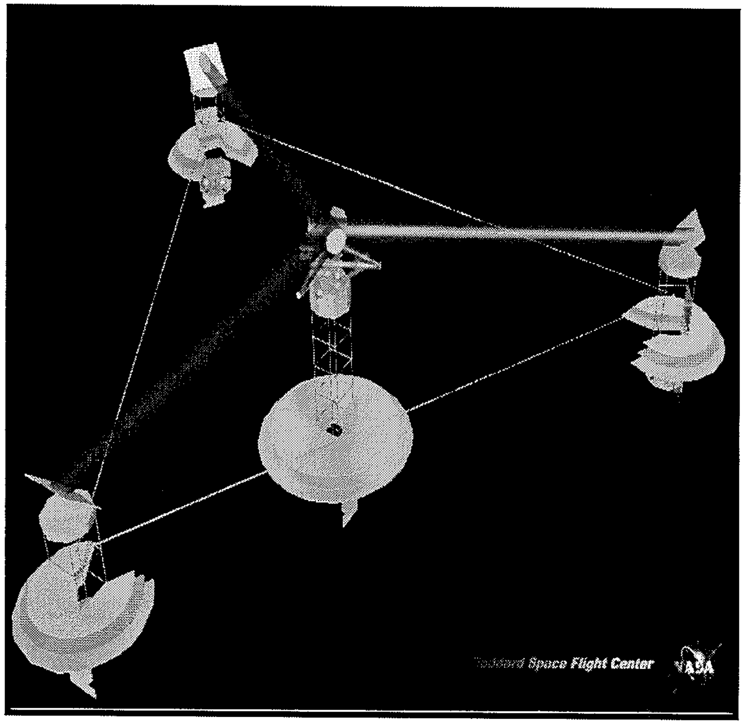
Formation Flying design shown here is one of three architectures currently being studied at JPL

- Objectives:
  - Direct detection of earth-like planets
  - Imaging astrophysics
- Features:
  - Mid-IR nuller
  - Separations of ~1m to 1 km

DARWIN

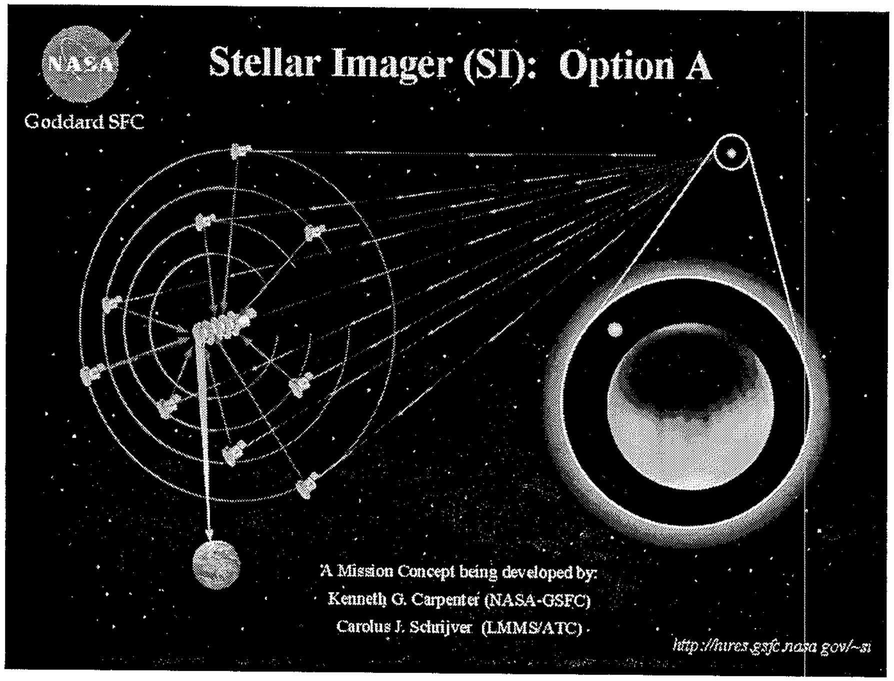
- Objectives:
  - Direct detection of earth-like planets
  - Imaging astrophysics
- Features:
  - Mid-IR nuller
- Similar goals to TPF

SPECS



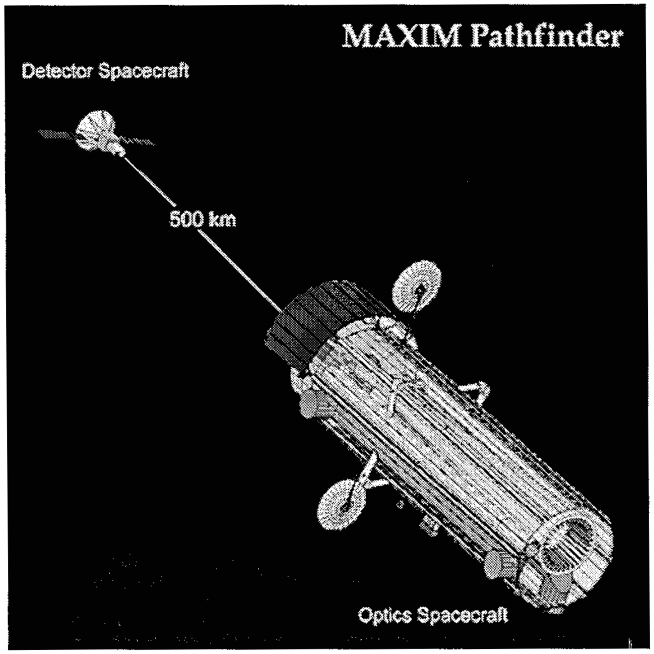
- Submillimeter Probe of the Evolution of Cosmic Structure
- Objective:
  - Study formation and evolution of stars and galaxies from primordial matter
- Features:
  - Submillimeter wavelengths
  - ~3 x 3 m mirrors
  - Separations out to ~1 km
  - Tethers
  - Wide-field imaging

Stellar Imager



- Objective:
  - Image the surfaces of nearby stars to better understand stellar physics
- Features:
  - UV wavelengths
  - 10-30 collectors, ~1 m diameter
  - Baselines to ~500 m

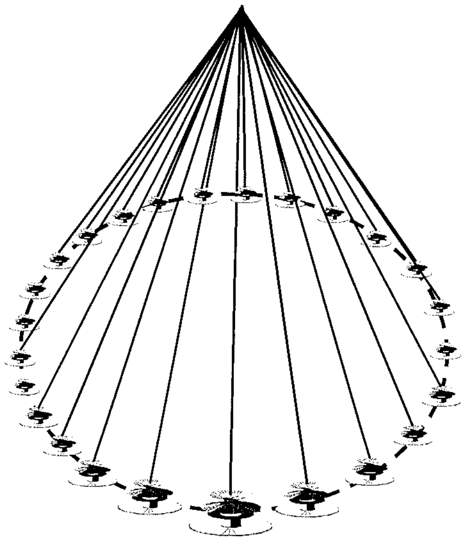
MAXIM

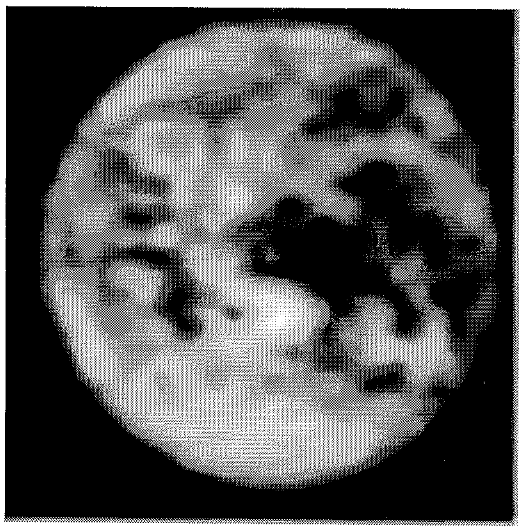


Architecture being considered for precursor mission

- Micro-Arcsecond X-Ray Imaging Mission
- Objectives:
  - Probe black hole event horizons
- Features:
  - X-Ray wavelengths
  - 33 collectors, at a distance of 500 km from combiner
  - 0.3 microarcsec resolution

Life Finder, Planet Imager





- Life Finder
  - Spectral features in planet atmospheres strongly indicative of life
  - 4 x 25 m apertures
  - 100 m baselines
- Planet Imager
  - 25 x 25 pixels over earth-like planet @ 10 pc
  - 25 x 40 m apertures
  - 400 km baselines