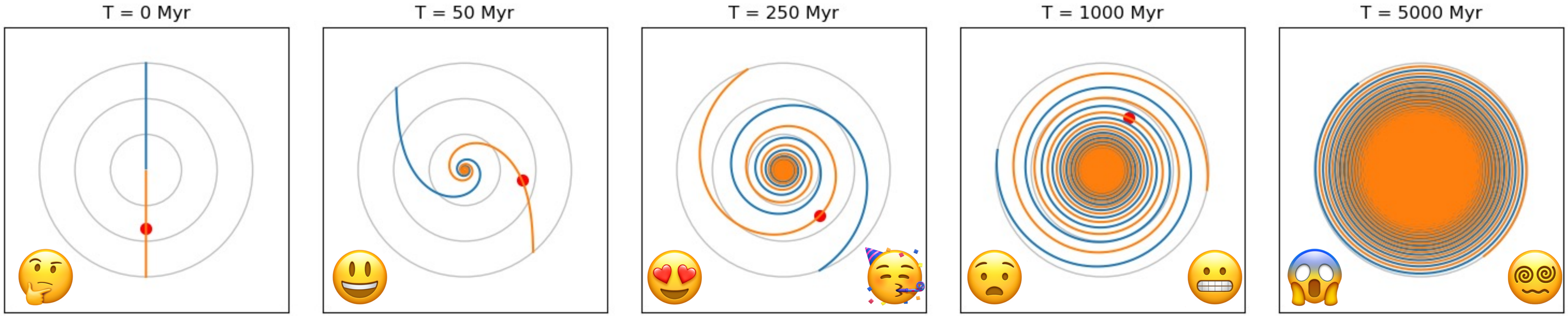
Making spiral arms

Imagine making a linear "ridge" of stars and letting it orbit around the galaxy. What happens over time?



The winding problem

Galaxies do not rotate like a solid object – since $V_c(R)$ is roughly constant with radius , the orbital time is short in the inner disk and long in the outer disk. This means any physical structure will wind up very quickly and be sheared away.

What would the rotation curve have to look like for this not to be a problem?

Orbital time is $T = \frac{2\pi R}{V_c(R)}$ so if the orbital time needs to be the same at all radius, then $V_c(R) = \frac{2\pi R}{T} \sim R$

"Solid Body Rotation"
Not what galaxies do!

Spiral Density Waves

Spirals cannot be physical structures orbiting coherently for long timescales. Instead, they are density waves moving through the disk. What is a density wave?

A traffic jam is an example of a density wave. Cars move in and out of the jam at a different speed than the jam itself moves.

Density Waves

Ω_p is called the **pattern speed.**

Spiral arms can't be physical arms – they would wind up too quickly.

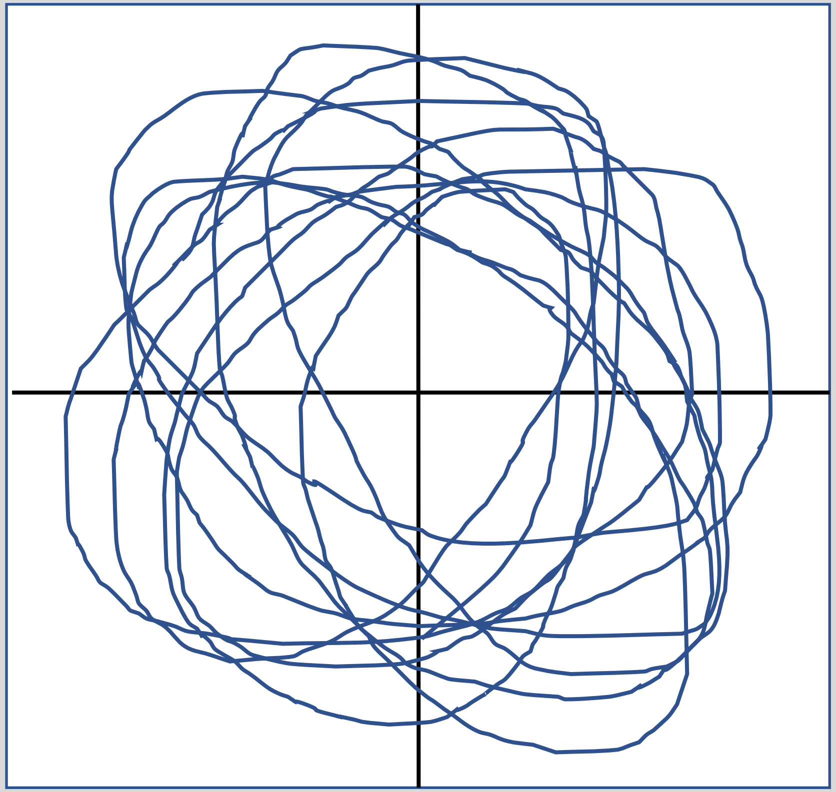
Instead consider a "density wave" – a pattern that moves through the disk at a frequency $\Omega_p < \Omega_{orb}$. Individual stars move in and out of the pattern as they orbit the galaxy, but their orbits are coordinated in such a way to sustain the pattern.

Q: How can orbits be coordinated to make a pattern? Need to think in terms of how orbits look in a rotating frame of reference.

Remember the important frequencies of orbits:

- Ω: orbital frequency (V/R)
- κ: epicyclic frequency

Viewed in a **non-rotating frame**, orbits in galactic potentials are open rosettes, since Ω/κ is generally non-integer.



Non-rotating frame

Density Waves

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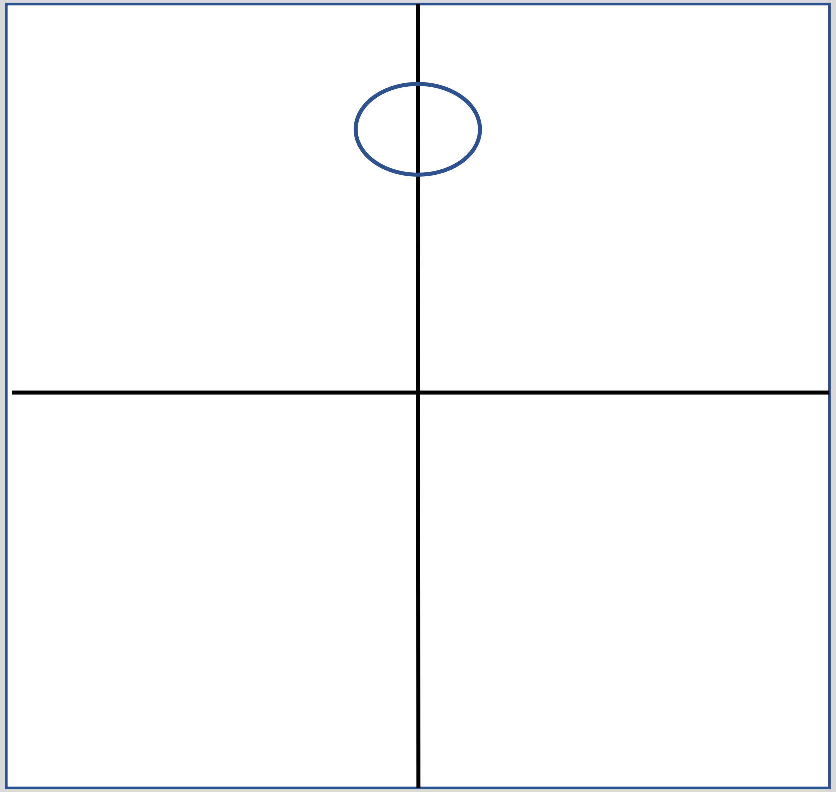
Viewed in frame **rotating at $\boldsymbol{\Omega_p = \Omega}$**, we saw the orbit showed the epicyclic motion.

(Here the rotating frame shows you how stars move relative to average circular motion as the disk rotates.)



Frame rotates at $\Omega_p = \Omega$

Density Waves

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Remember the important frequencies of orbits:

- Ω: orbital frequency (V/R)
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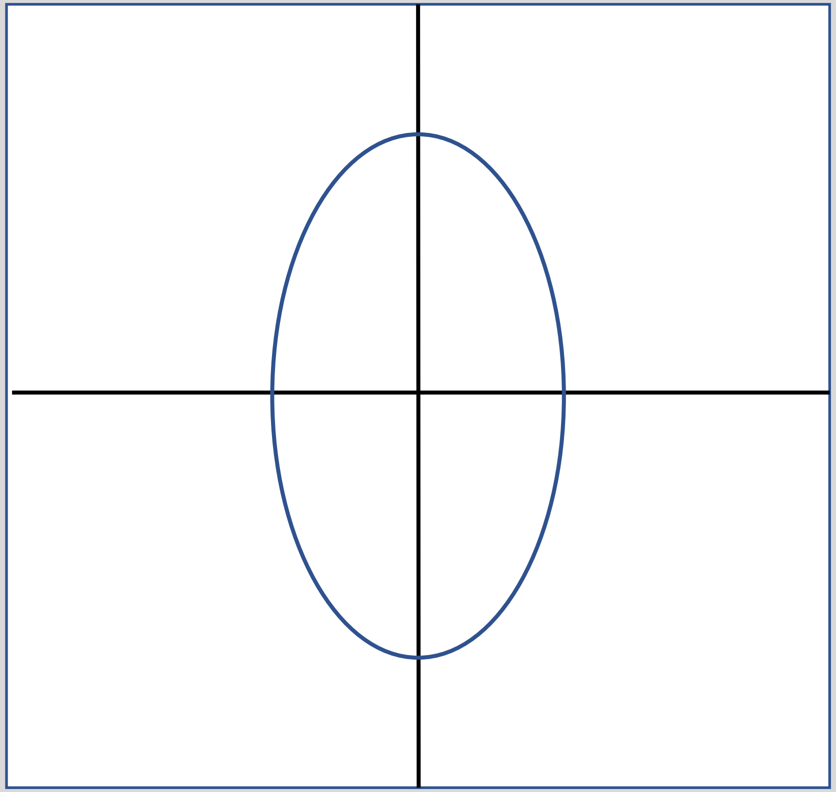
Viewed in frame **rotating at $\boldsymbol{\Omega_p = \Omega - \kappa/2}$**, the orbit appears as a closed ellipse.

(Here the rotating frame shows you how stars move relative to an average motion at Ω_p.)



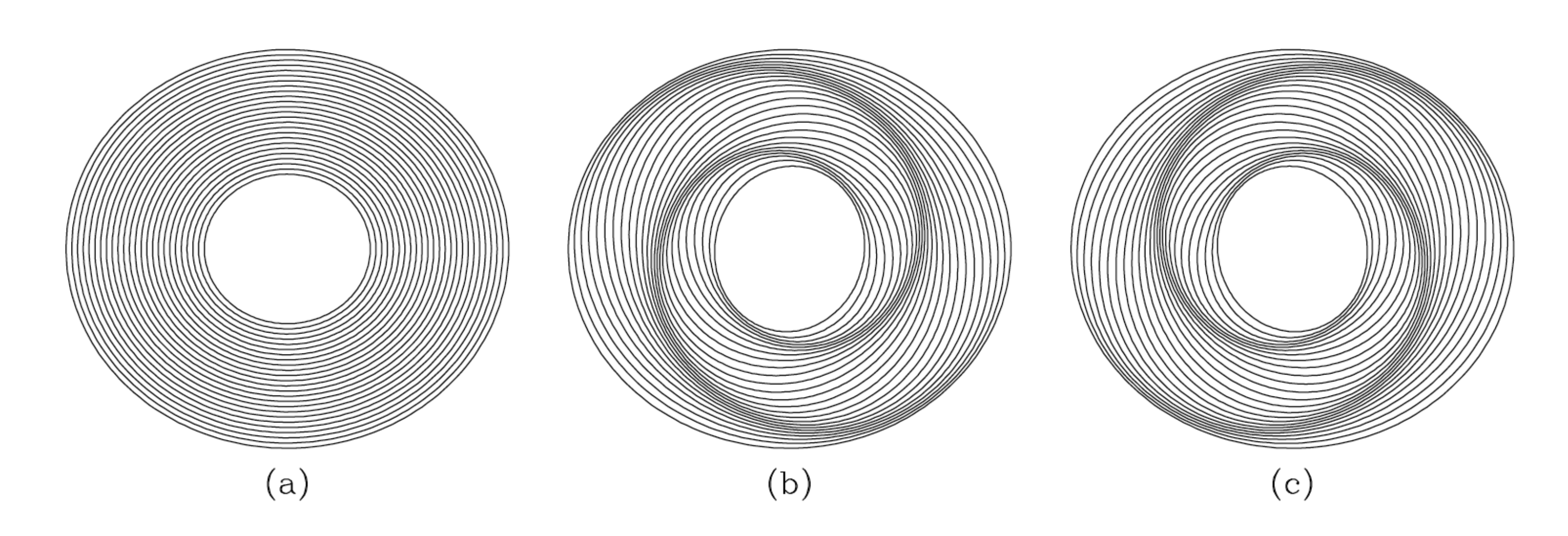
Frame rotates at $\Omega_p = \Omega - \frac{\kappa}{2}$

Density Waves

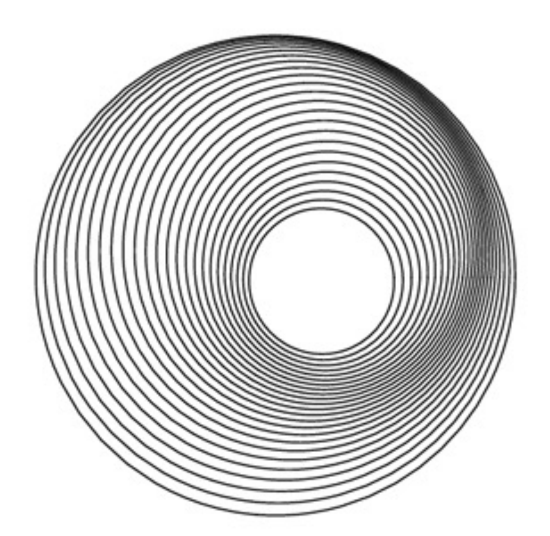
In general, viewed in frames rotating at $\Omega_p = \Omega - \frac{n}{m}\kappa$ orbits appear closed if n, m are integers.

Closed orbits in a rotating frame mean that the pattern will stay in shape, but rotate slowly at a rate Ω_p, even though the stars are orbiting at a different rate of $\Omega = V_c/R$.

So we can set up nested orbits in a variety of patterns to form bars and spirals ($m = 2$):



Or one-armed spirals ($m = 1$):



Those spiral patterns will then rotate at a pattern speed $\Omega_p = \Omega - \frac{n}{m}\kappa$, and stars (orbiting at Ω) will move in and out of the spiral pattern.

Density Waves

Remember, Ω and κ are set by the rotation curve. So we can look at $\Omega_p = \ \Omega - \frac{n}{m}\kappa$ as a function of radius given a rotation curve.

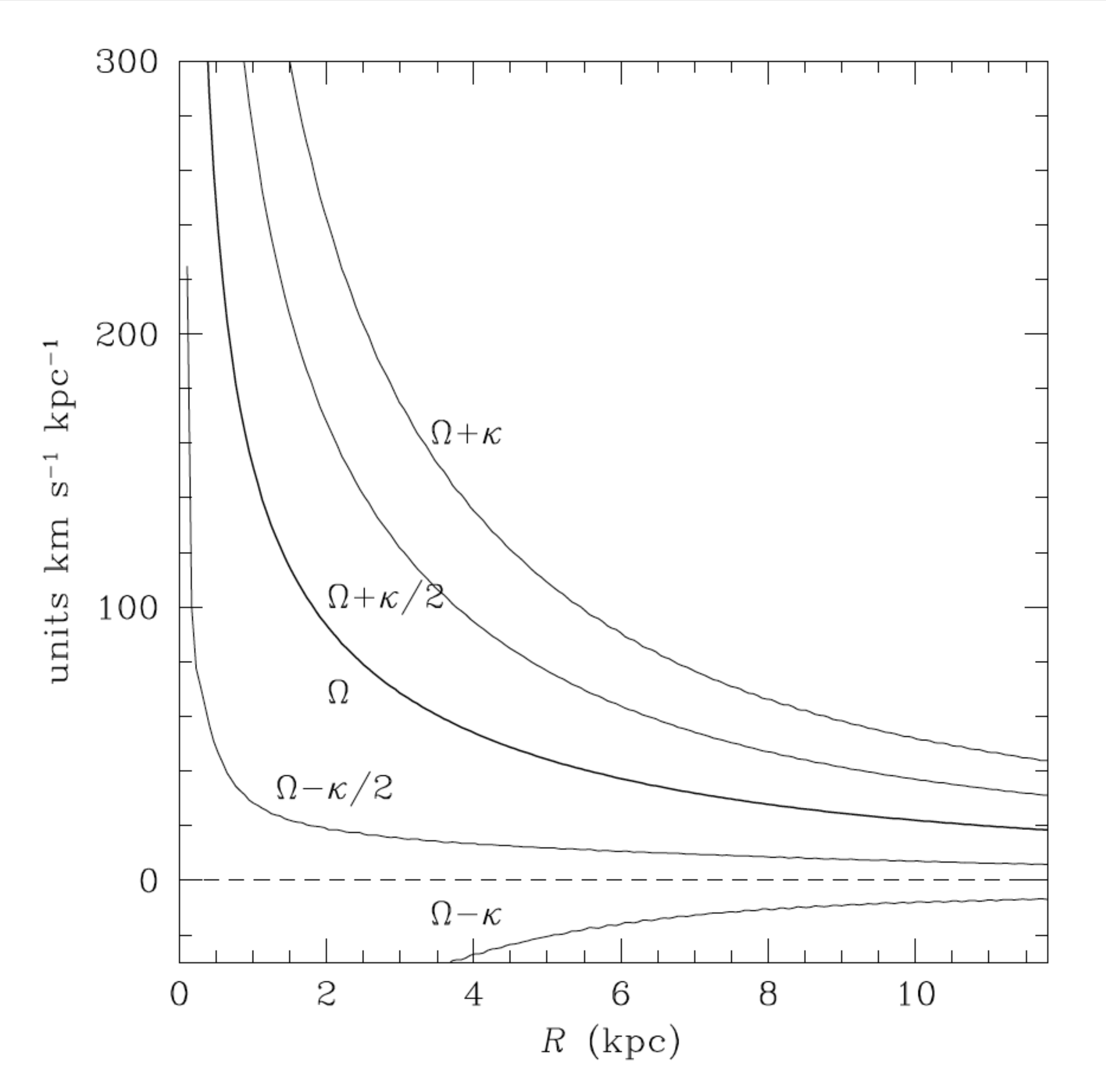
For typical rotation curves, $\Omega - \frac{\kappa}{2}$ is nearly constant over a wide range of radius.

Look at winding up via spiral arm pitch angles.

Physical arms	$\cot\alpha = Rt\left\|\frac{\partial\Omega}{\partial R}\right\|$
Density waves	$\cot\alpha = Rt\left\|\frac{\partial(\Omega-\kappa/2)}{\partial R}\right\|$

Smaller gradient means bigger pitch angles (less winding)

Since $\Omega - \frac{\kappa}{2}$ is not perfectly constant, we still have winding, but slower by a factor of ~ 5. So density waves last longer, but still must be regenerated or reinforced.



Density Waves

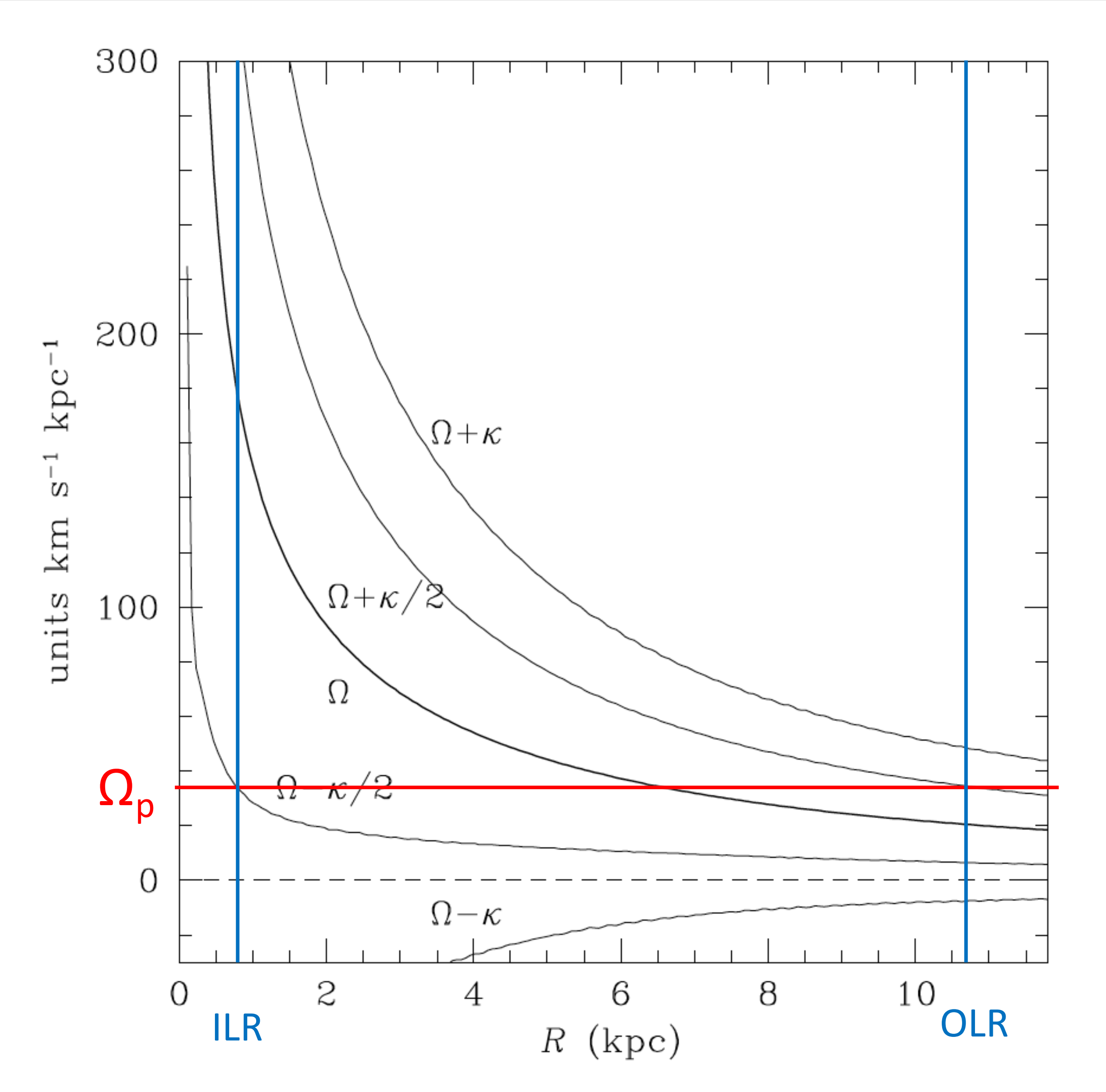
So far, we have only considered ***kinematic*** density waves (correlated motion). But as stars move through the pattern, the mass of the density wave can perturb their motion and strengthen the wave: “**self-gravity.**”

A star passes through the pattern with a frequency $m\left[\Omega_p - \Omega(R)\right]$. If that frequency is slower than the epicyclic frequency, the perturbation will strengthen the spiral pattern.

m=2 spirals reinforced only in the region where

$$\Omega - \kappa/2 < \Omega_p < \ \Omega + \kappa/2$$

These critical limits are known as the **Inner and Outer Lindblad Resonances**. At the LRs, a star enters the pattern each time at the same point in the epicycle. This pumps energy into the orbits of stars, destroying the wave pattern.



Spiral Density Waves: Recapping the story....

- Spiral patterns are waves moving through the disk at an angular speed Ω_p. Stars move through this wave but do not stay in it *(think cars on the freeway moving through a traffic jam....).*

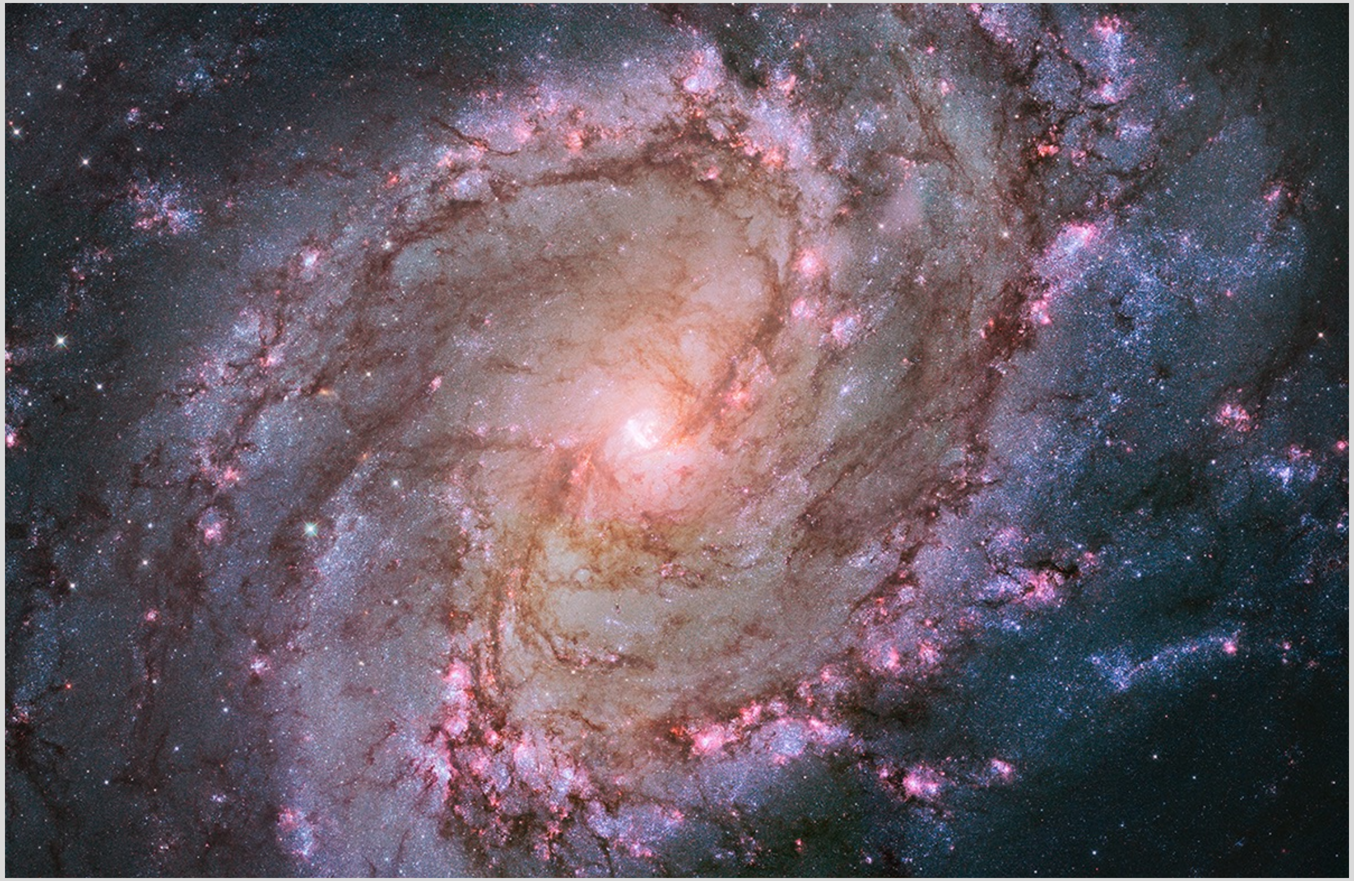
- Properties of the wave depend on the circular speed and the epicyclic frequency of the disk.

- Spiral waves can be sustained between the inner and outer Lindblad resonances.

- The gravity of the disk can amplify/sustain the spiral beyond a pure kinematic wave.

- Arms still wind up, but more slowly than expected if rotating at the rotation frequency, Ω.

- As gas moves into the spiral arms, it is shocked and driven into gravitational collapse, triggering star formation.

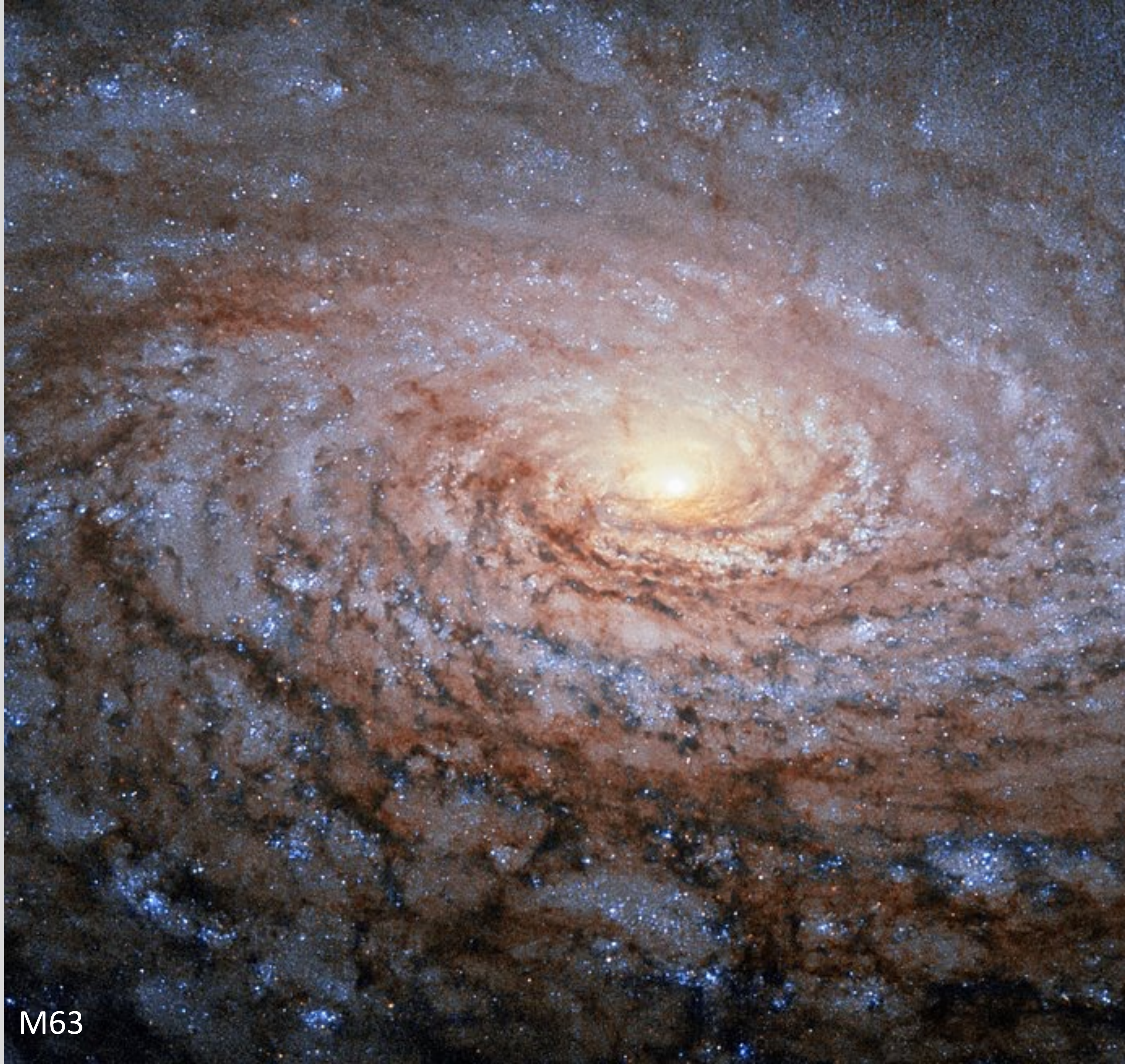


But where do they come from?

Rotational shearing: Take a patch newly formed stars, shear it out as the galaxy rotates.

Works on small scales, likely what’s going on in flocculent spirals.

Not a good explanation by itself for large, organized spiral arms. But maybe self gravity can amplify the effect?



But where do they come from?

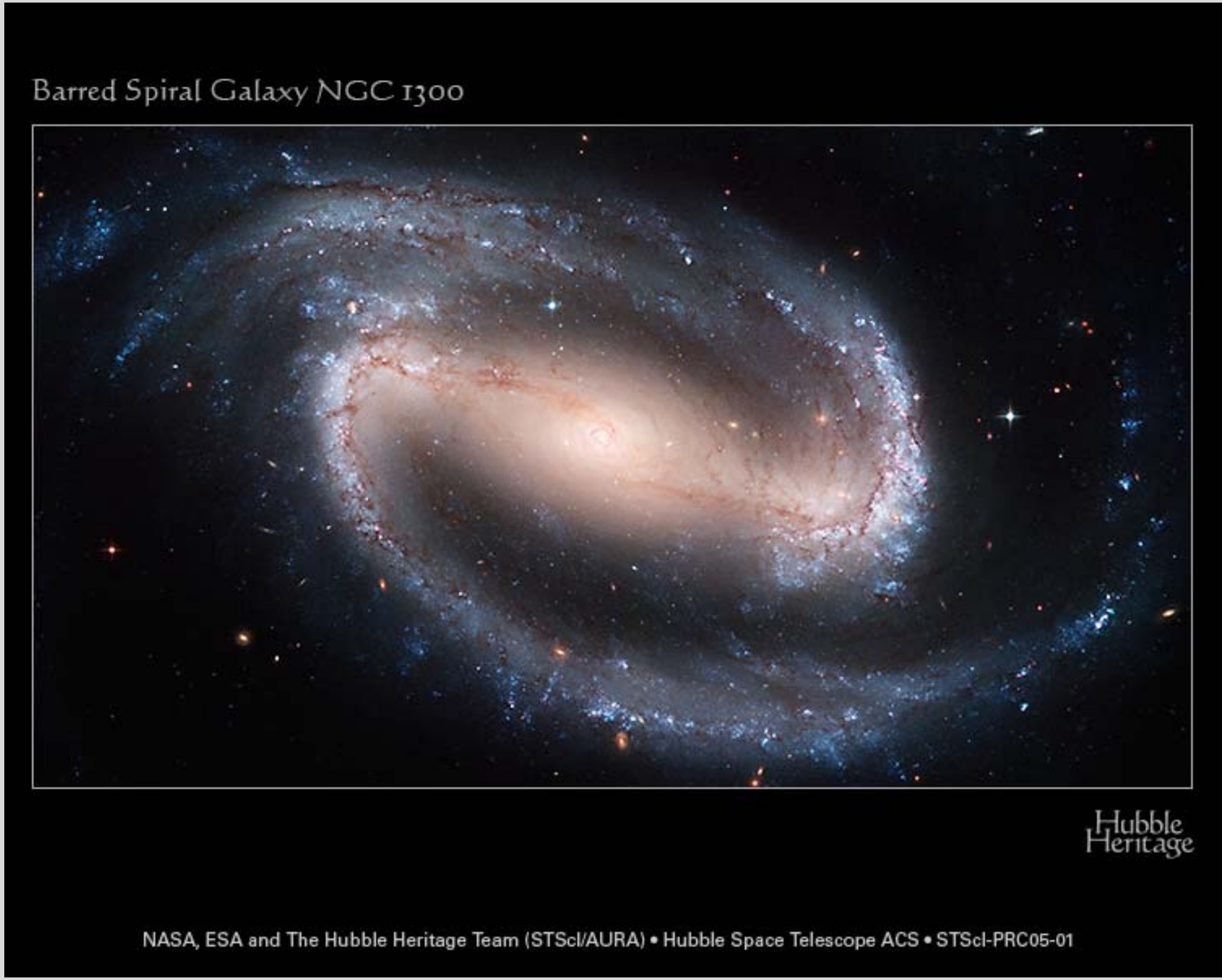
Interactions: A companion galaxy can drive a perturbation that leads to spiral structure.

But not all spirals have massive companions.

- Past encounters?
- Lower mass companions driving periodic perturbation?

But where do they come from?

Bars: The gravitational perturbation of a rotating bar may drive spiral waves in the disk.



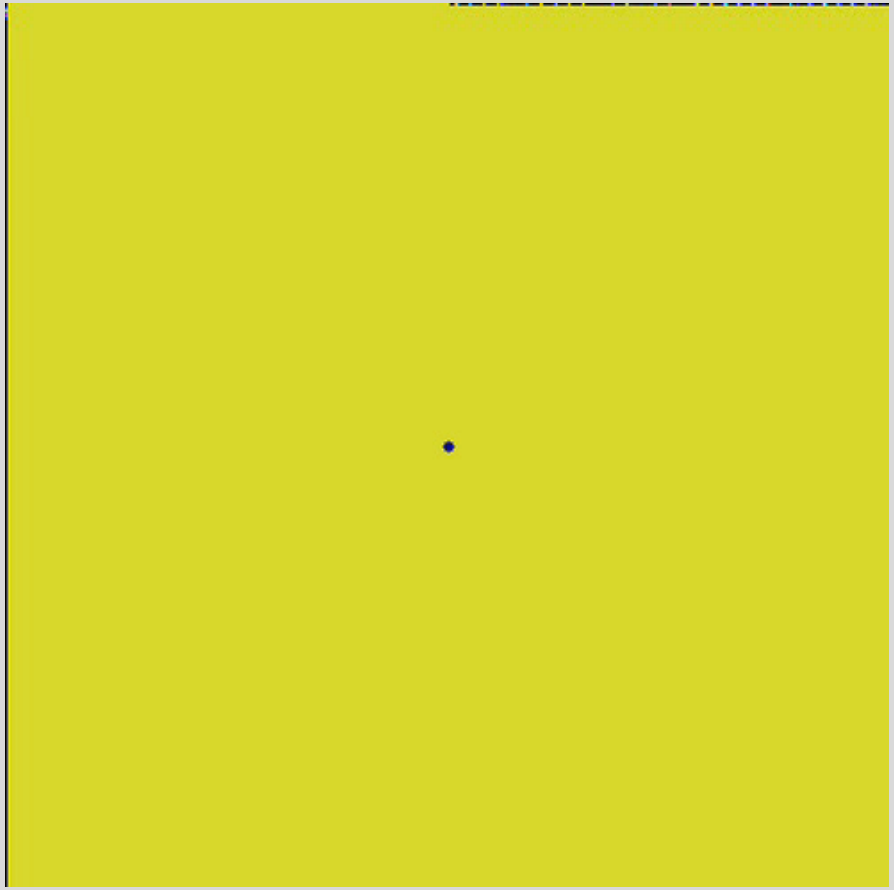
Instability and Galactic Bars

Spiral density wave scenario built on linear perturbation theory, epicyclic approximation, etc: all small amplitude deviations from axisymmetry and circular motion. What happens when the amplitude gets too strong?

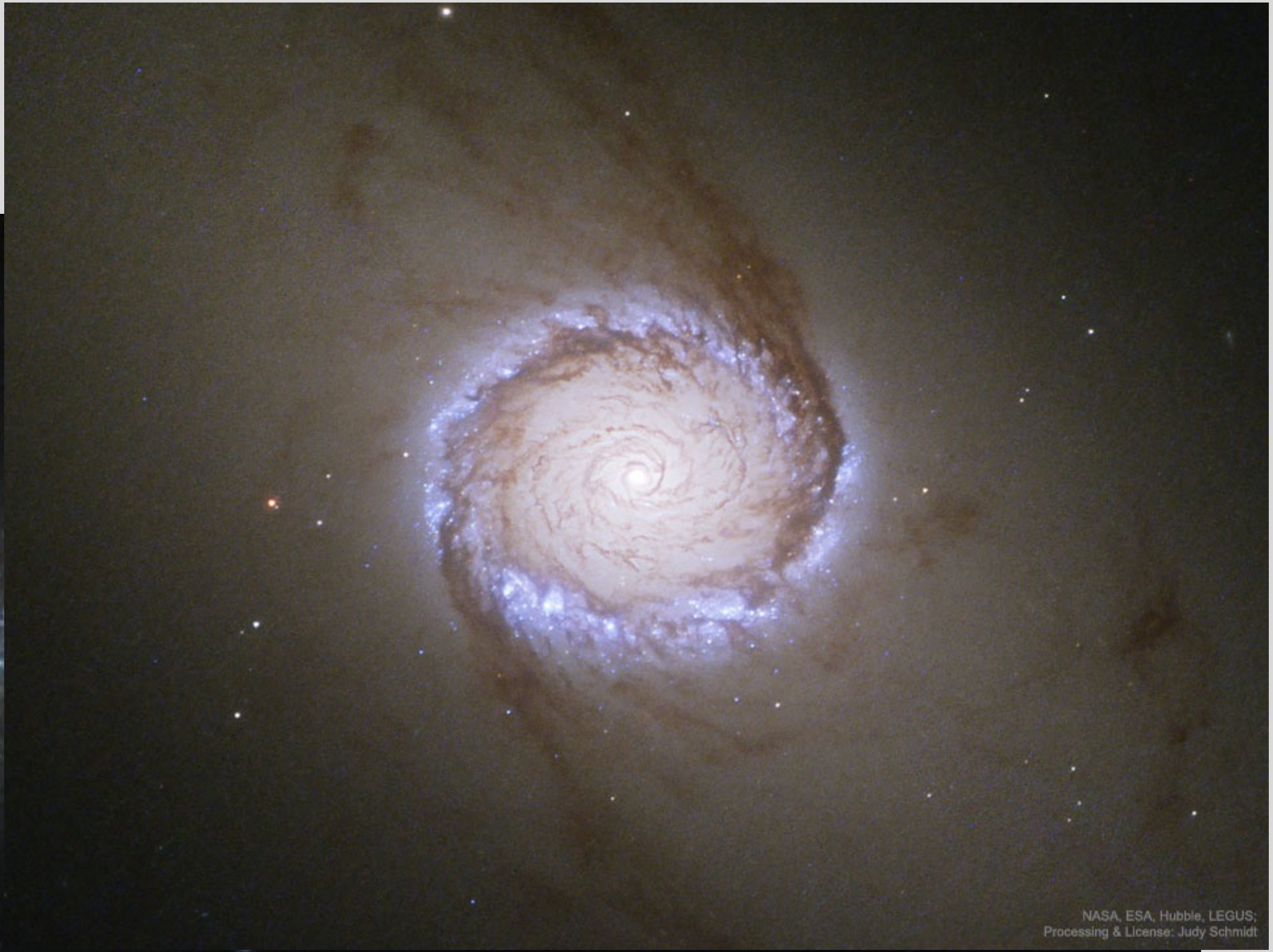
Stars no longer stay on near-circular rosettes – they lose angular momentum and move along more radial orbits along the rotating bar: "trapped in the bar".

Bar drives strong shocks and inflow of gas to the inner regions.

Piner+99 (courtesy J. Stone)



NGC 1512: Barred Galaxy with Starburst Ring



Destroying the bar

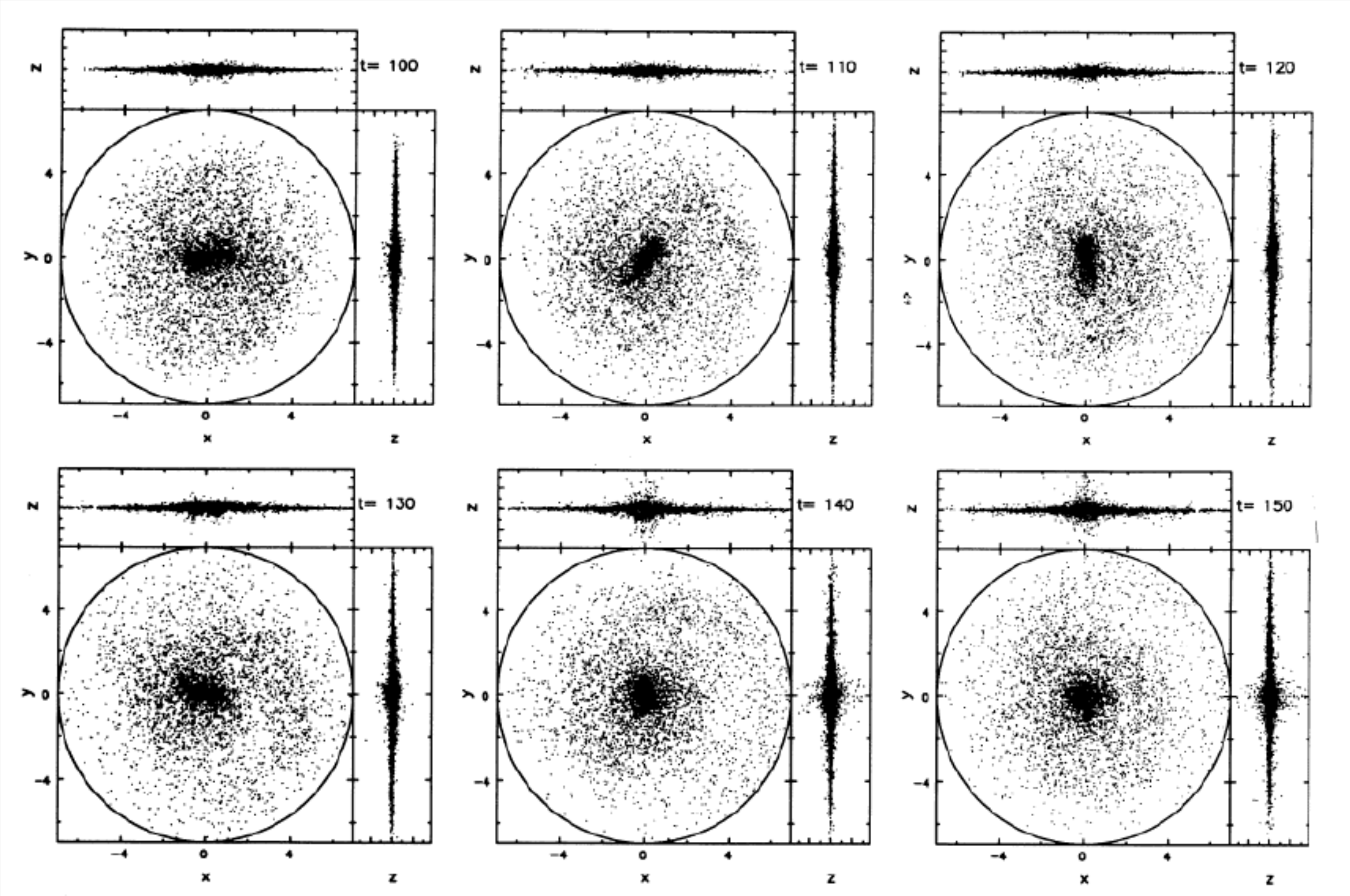
Norman+ 96

To destroy the bar, need to scatter stars off the X_1 orbits that define the bar.

Central mass concentations more massive than ~ few % of disk mass can do this scattering.

What are “central mass concentrations” and how can we get them?

5% mass central concentration grown slowly in barred galaxy simulation. 👉



Disk Stability: the Toomre Q-parameter

Waves can grow or dissipate, depending on kinematics of the rotation curve and the self-gravity of the disk.

Toomre (1964) derived a condition for disk stability for $m = 0$ axisymmetric modes (rings):

σ_R: radial velocity dispersion
κ: epicyclic frequency
Σ: disk mass surface density

$$Q = \frac{\sigma_R \kappa}{3.36 G\Sigma} > 1$$

Qualitatively: *Self-gravity tries to draw a perturbation together, but if over an epicyclic timescale a star skates from one perturbation to another, no single perturbation will grow.* $\Rightarrow$ *Stability.*

Used as an indicator for local (small-scale) instabilities:

$Q \gg 1$: "hot disk", very hard to make perturbations grow.
$Q \ll 1$: "cold disk", very unstable, mass perturbations will grow quickly with time.

What happens to a disk with $Q \ll 1$?

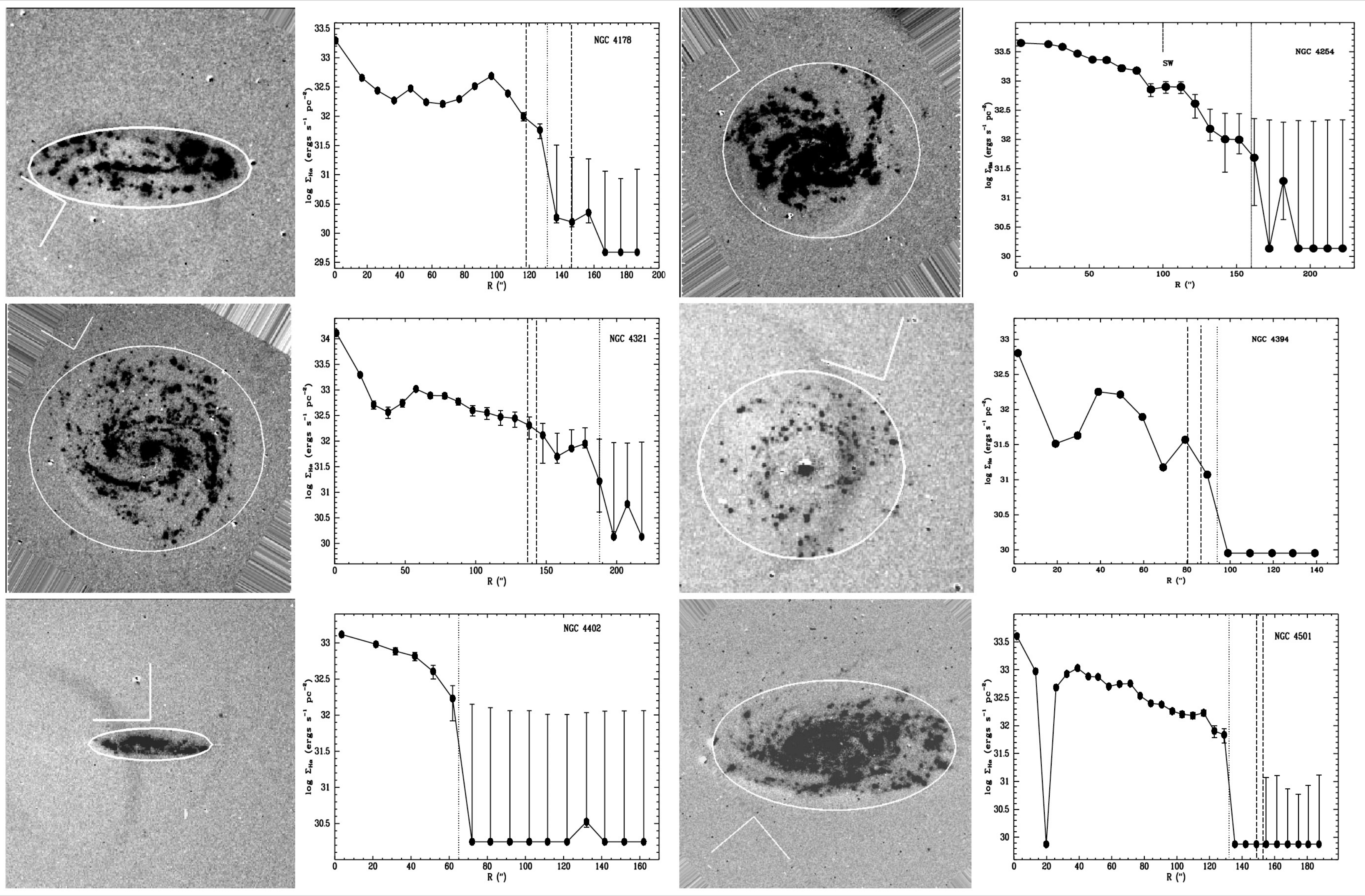
Milky Way (solar neighborhood):

$$\left.\begin{array}{l} \bullet\ \sigma_R \approx 30\ \text{km/s} \\ \bullet\ \kappa \approx 36\ \text{km/s/kpc} \\ \bullet\ \Sigma \approx 50\ \text{M}_\odot/\text{pc}^2 \end{array}\right\} Q \sim 1.4$$

Disk Instabilities and Star Formation

[Martin & Kennicutt 01]

Galaxies often show a reasonably well defined radius beyond which very little widespread star formation is observed.



Hα imaging and Hα surface brightness profiles

Disk Instabilities and Star Formation

Star formation does sometimes occur in galaxy outskirts, but much weaker in intensity and less well organized

“extended disk star formation”
or
“XUV galaxies”

M83
GALEX UV

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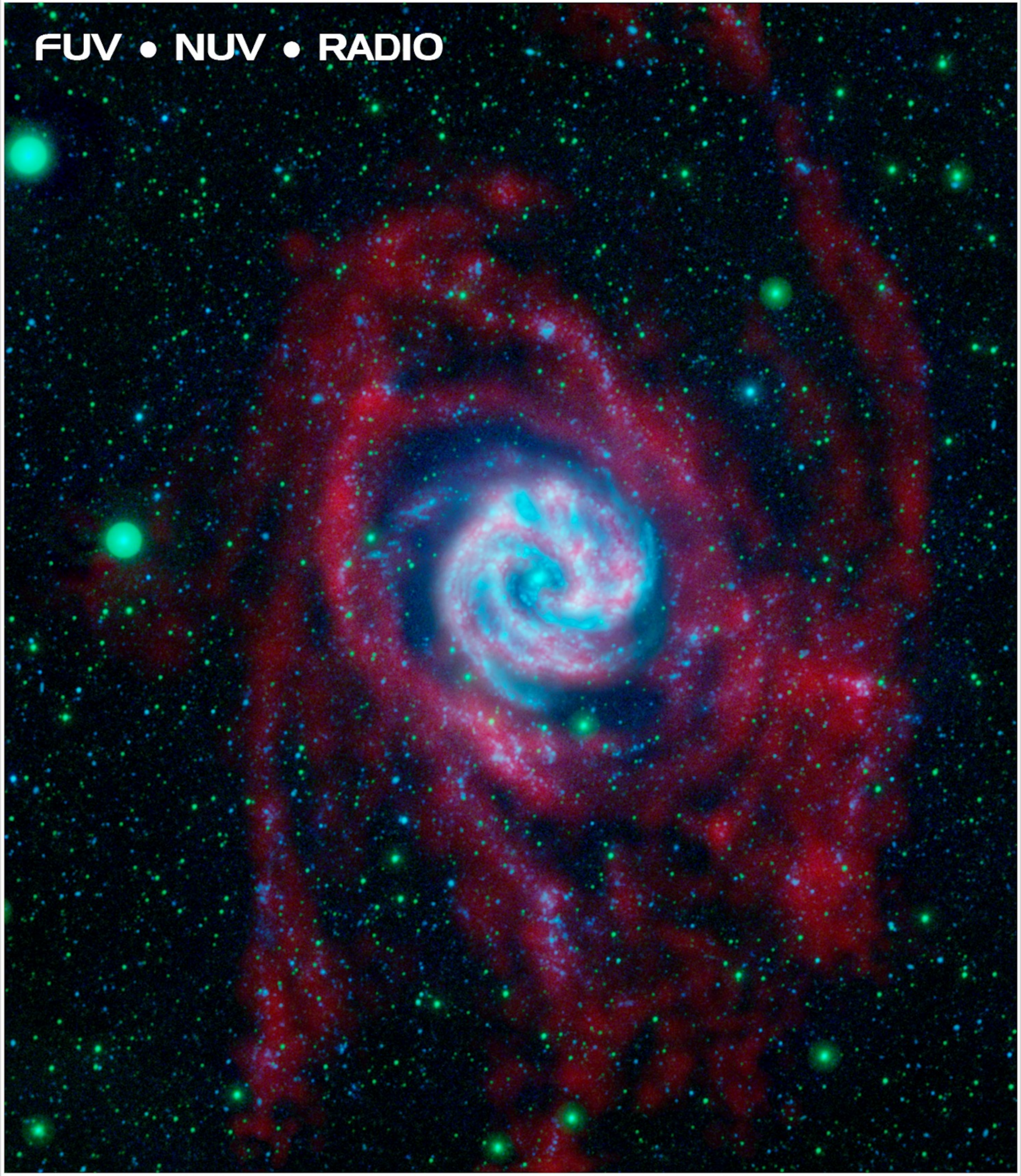
21-cm HI



Instability-Driven Star Formation Scenarios

Remember the expression for local disk stability.

σ_R: radial velocity dispersion
κ: epicyclic frequency
Σ: disk mass surface density

$$Q = \frac{\sigma_R \kappa}{3.36 G \Sigma} > 1$$

At lower densities disks are more stable. Solve for the density where $Q = 1$ and call that the critical density:

$$Q = \frac{\sigma_R \kappa}{3.36 G \Sigma} = 1 \quad \longrightarrow \quad \Sigma_{crit} = \frac{\sigma_R \kappa}{3.36 G}$$

Then we have two regimes:

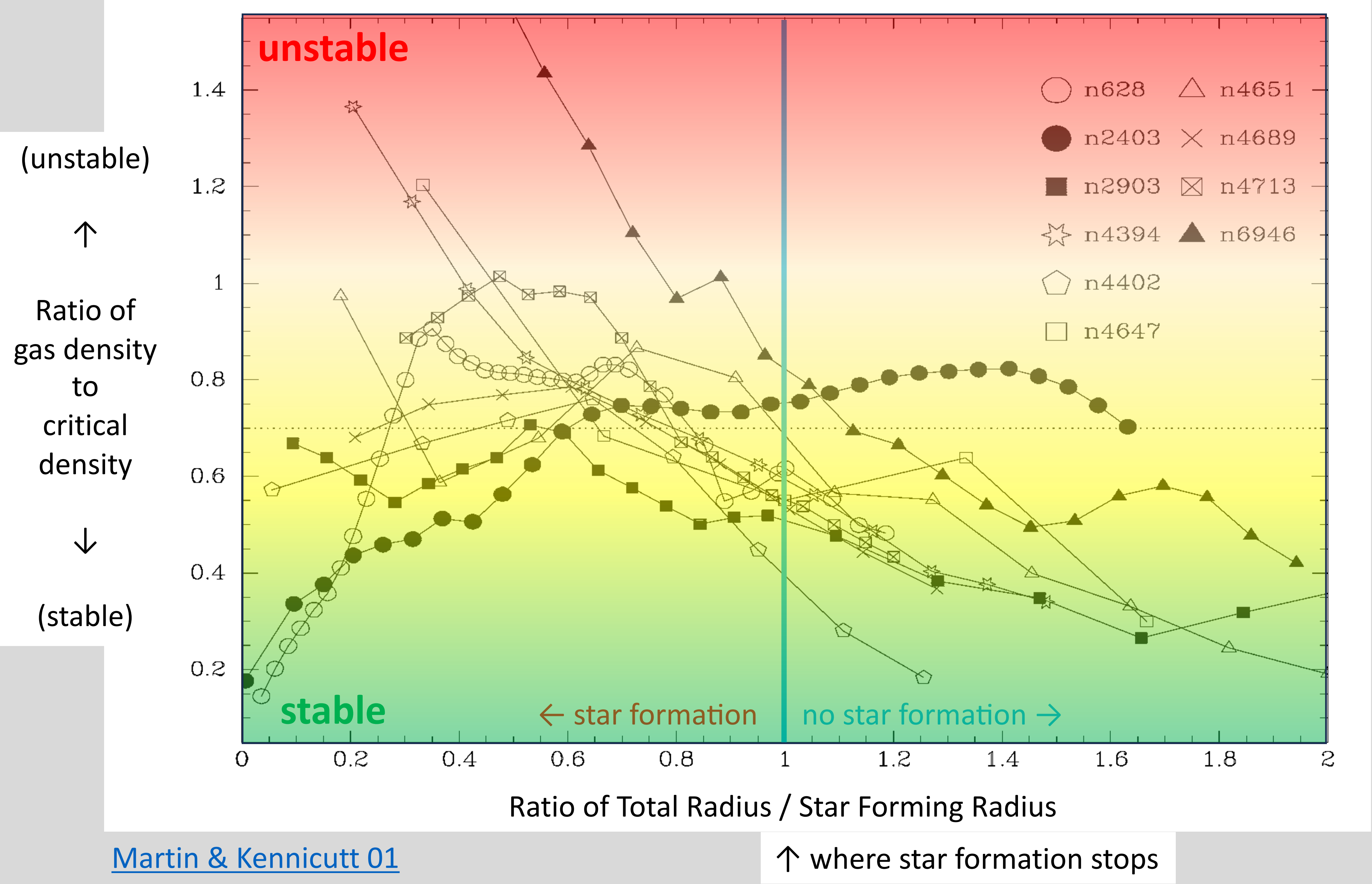
- High gas density: $\Sigma_{gas} > \Sigma_{crit}$, gas is ”supercritical” and can undergo gravitational collapse to form stars
- Low gas density: $\Sigma_{gas} < \Sigma_{crit}$, gas is stable, not enough gravity to drive collapse. No star formation.

But this is all a simplified theory. Does it actually work?

Does it work?

Maybe?
Kinda?

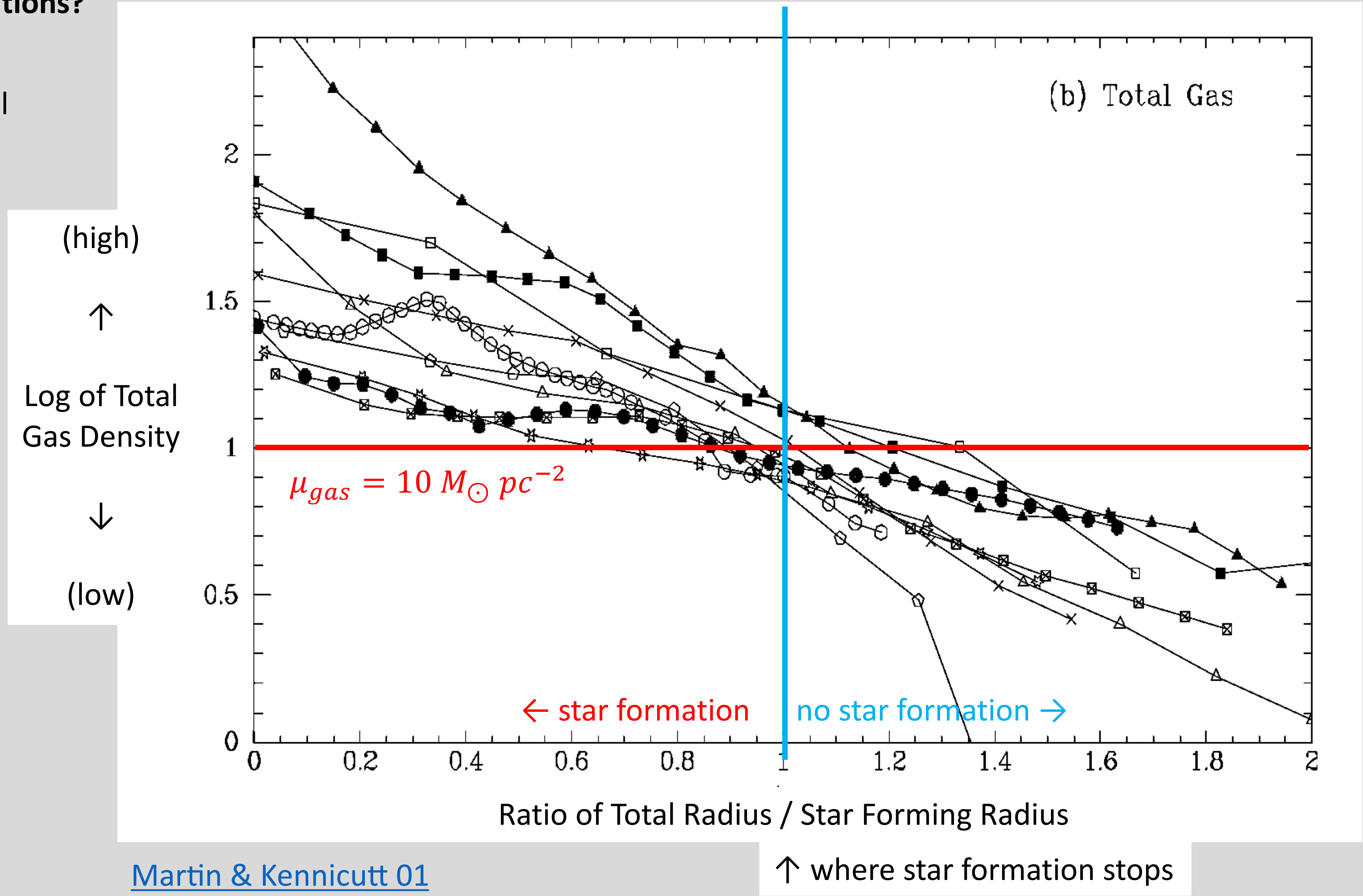
Outer disks are typically below the critical density, but inner disks are more complicated..



[Martin & Kennicutt 01]

Or is it simply local conditions?

Ignore critical/dynamical arguments, just look at total gas density.



Martin & Kennicutt 01

Low density environments

Star formation efficiency greatly reduced.

Is it dynamical stability (a global concept applied locally) or is it purely local conditions? Unclear.

But whatever is happening is connected to disk galaxy evolution: lower SFRs, lower metallicities, more gas-rich, less molecular gas, etc.

Compare:

- LSB galaxies
- low density outskirts of HSB galaxies

Differences and similarities will tell us much....