



Daily Measures In Couple Therapy: What Is The Shape Of Change?

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INTRODUCTION

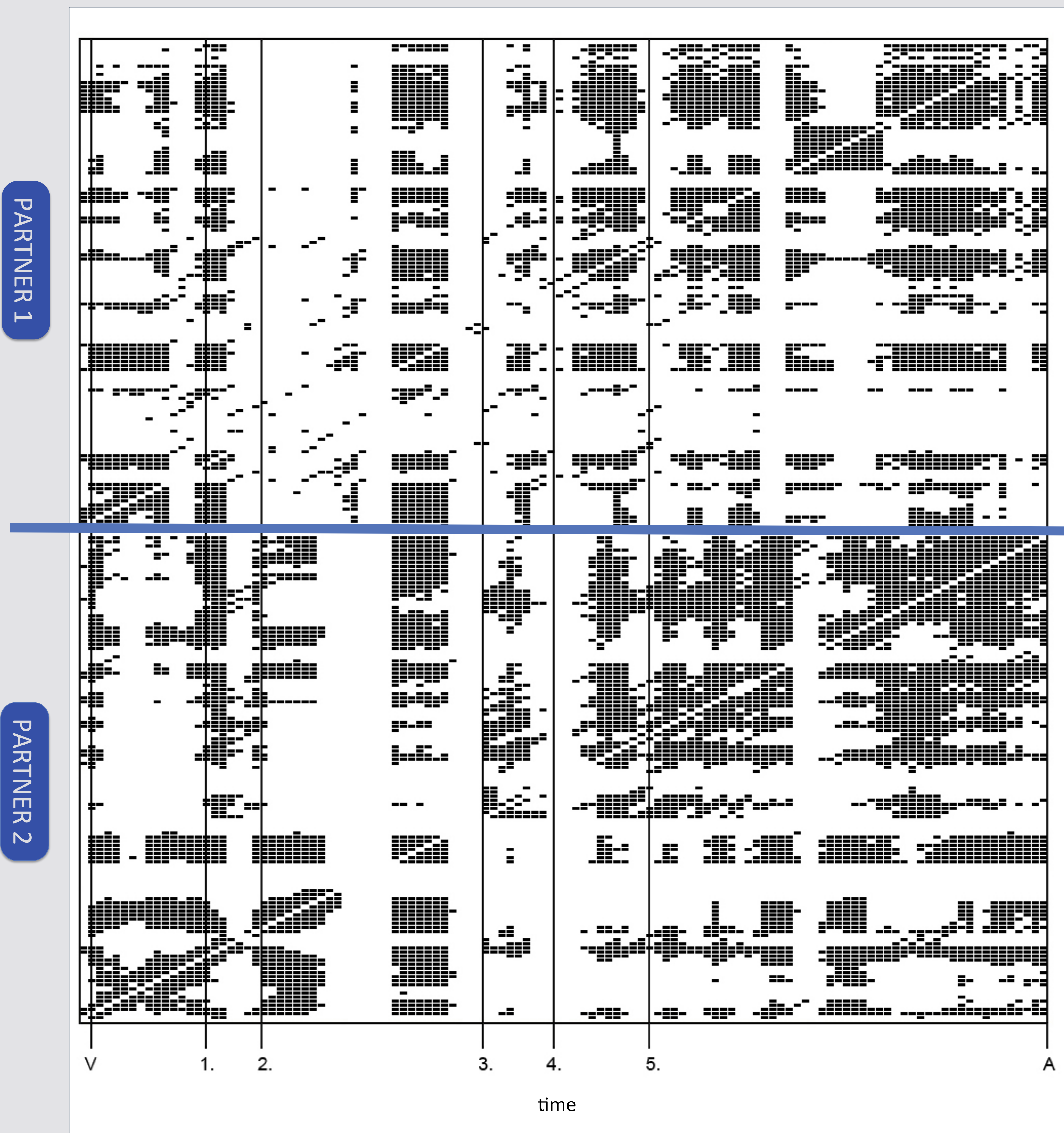
Up to now randomized controlled trials are the method of choice in couple therapy research. As a result, change has so far been defined as the deviation of the post-measurement's data from the pre-measurement's data. The space of time *between* those two measuring points remains unexplored, therefore little is known about how change evolves over time and which “shape” it takes. Theoretically a distinction is made between **first-order-change** (slowly evolving continuous change *within* the rules of a system) and **second-order-change** (abrupt discontinuous change: the system is defined through new rules) (Levy & Merry, 1986).

METHOD

In the presented study **daily measurement** was taken on three couples during the whole therapeutic process to shed some light on the “black box” between pre- and post-measurement and to gain insight into the “shape” of change. By means of an online-questionnaire (SNS), cognition-, emotion-, and behavior-patterns were investigated. On the basis of **recurrence plots**, a non-linear analysis-method, the different processes of change were explored and contrasted. In recurrence plots, black points represent phases of stability, white stripes phases of instability. A drift to the upper right shows that the system has arrived in a new attractor.

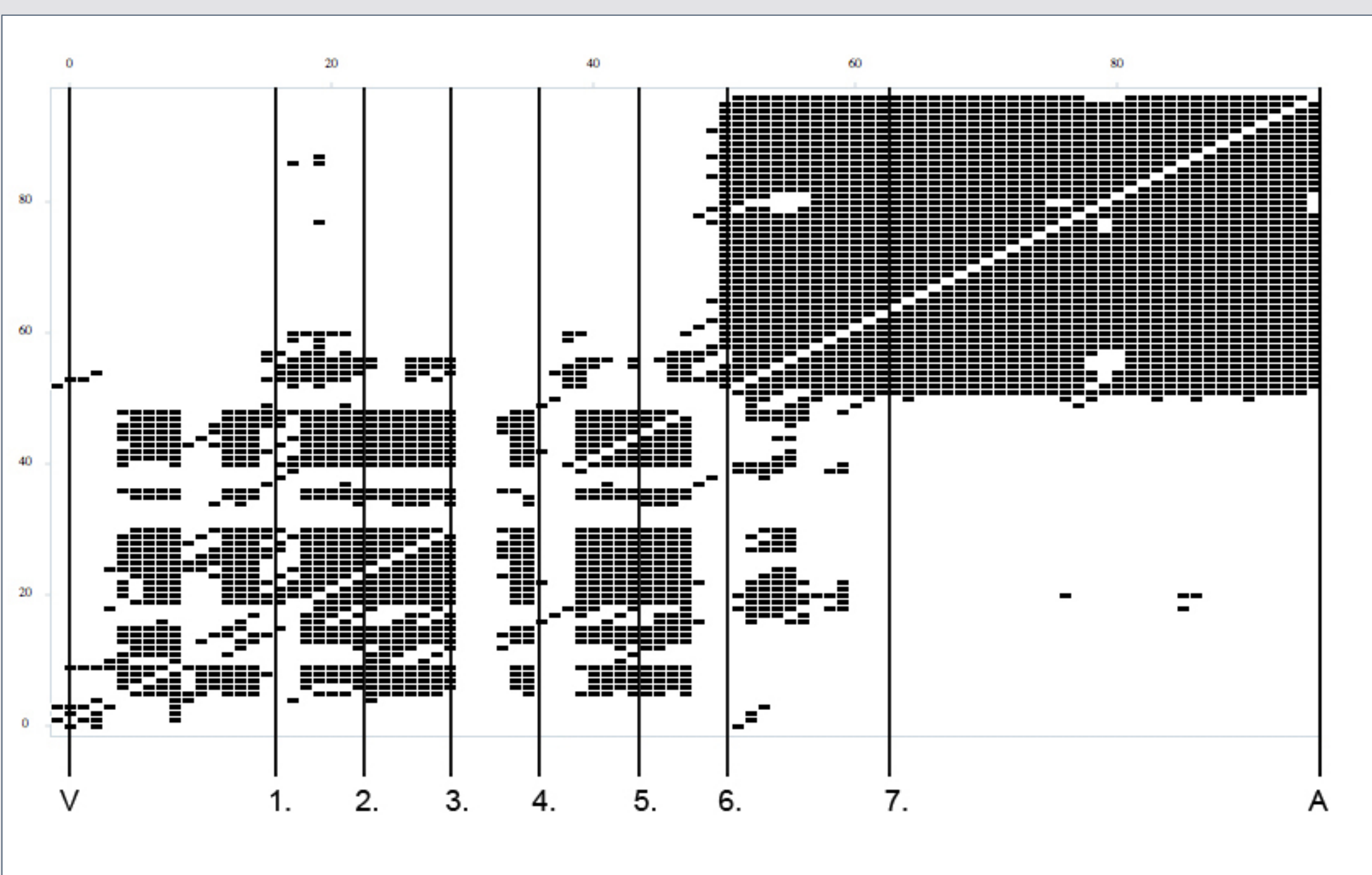
RESULTS

Couple 1: no phase transition, system remains in the “old” attractor, synchronous phases of stability and instability between the partners

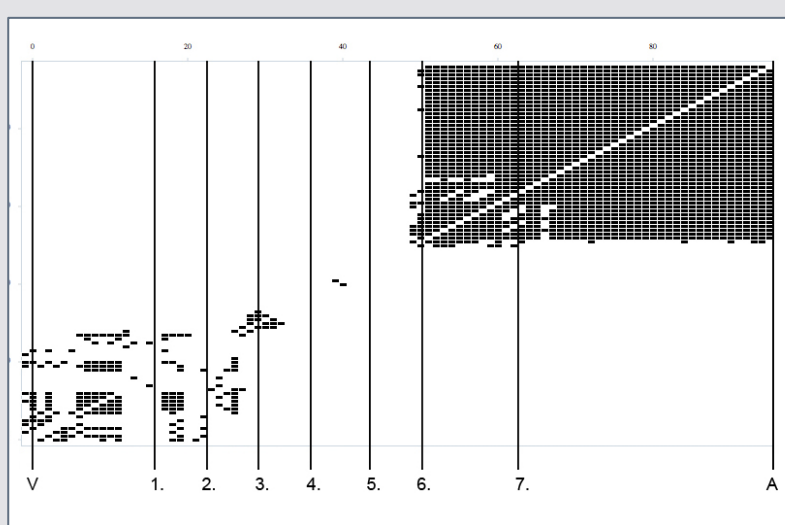


First-order-change
with high intradyadic similarity

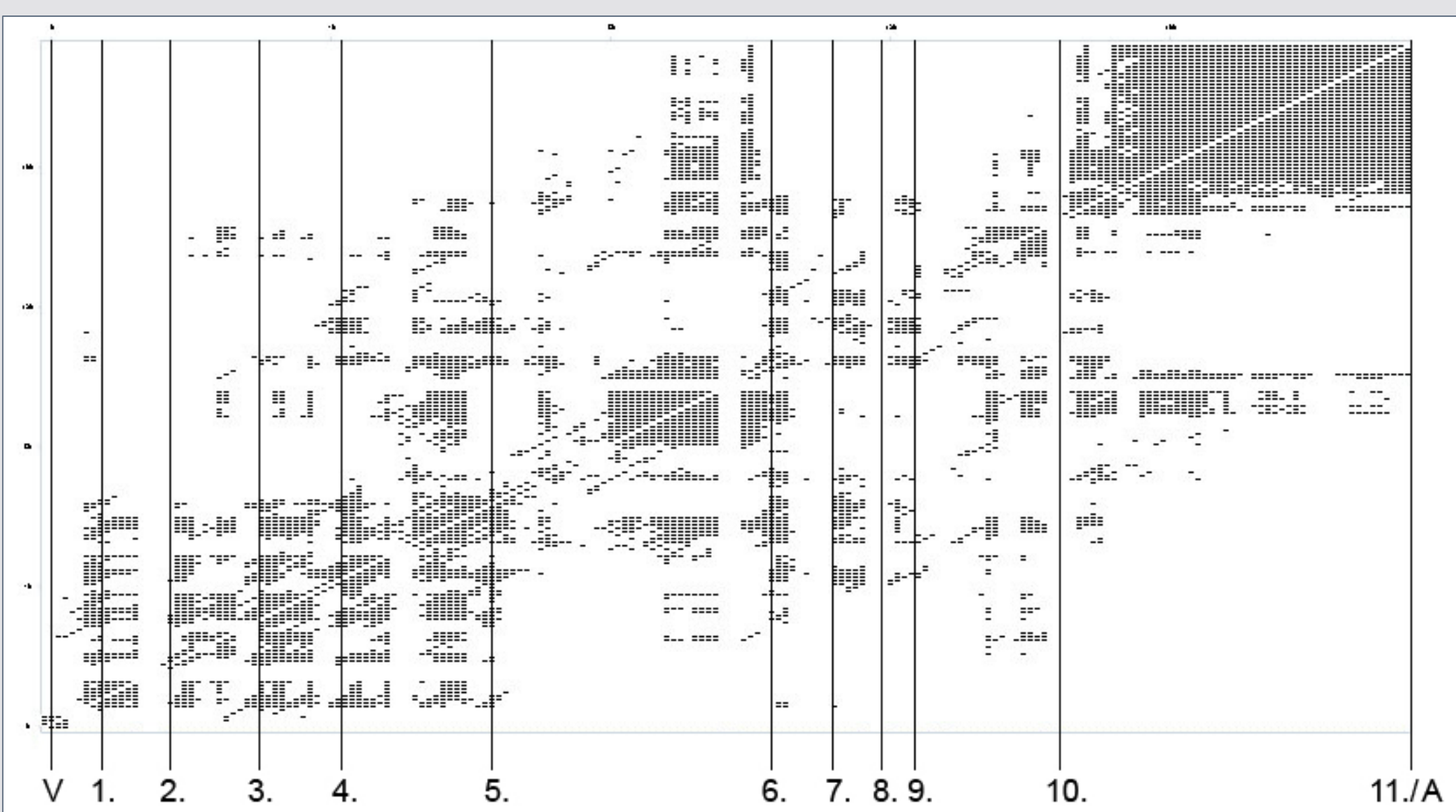
Couple 2: sudden change into a new attractor



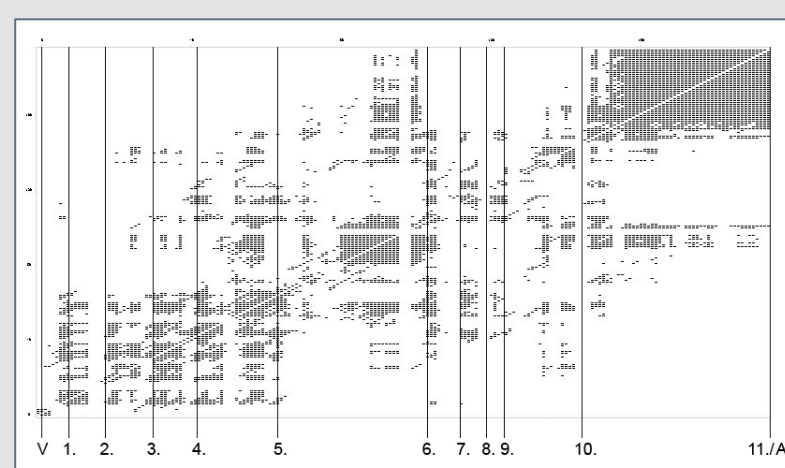
Abrupt
second-order-change



Couple 3: continuous drift into a new attractor



Continuous
second-order-change



DISCUSSION

Three prototypical shapes of change arose:

- couples who remained in a stable attractor but oscillated between phases of stability and instability (first-order-change, couple 1)
- couples who performed a sudden/abrupt change to a new attractor (abrupt second-order-change, couple 2)
- couples who changed slowly and continuously to a new attractor (continuous second-order-change, couple 3)

Hence the theoretical concept of first- and second-order-change could be modified to that effect that a second-order-change can not only evolve in an abrupt way, but also continuously.

Furthermore it has been shown that all three forms of change were perceived as a therapeutic success by the couples themselves at the end of therapy (measured by pre-/post-questionnaires).

The intra-dyadic similarity of each couple was higher than the inter-dyadic one.

REFERENCES

- Levy, Amir & Merry, Uri (1986). *Organizational transformation*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
Ulrich, Cornelia (2012). *Paartherapie-Prozessforschung. Entwicklung und Anwendung einer innovativen Forschungsstrategie*. Hamburg: Dr. Kovač Verlag.