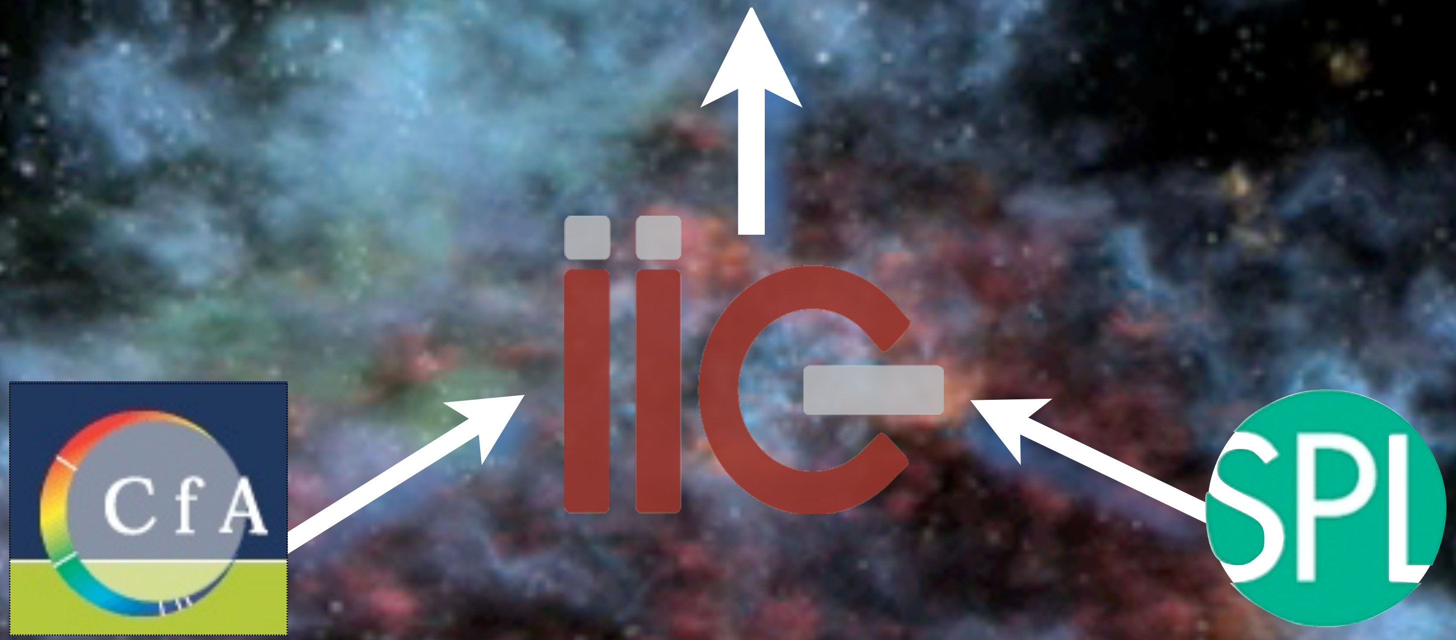
“Astronomical Medicine”



Alyssa A. Goodman (CfA, IIC)

Team

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Institutions

IIC=Initiative in Innovative Computing at Harvard
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SPL=Surgical Planning Laboratory at Brigham and Women’s Hospital

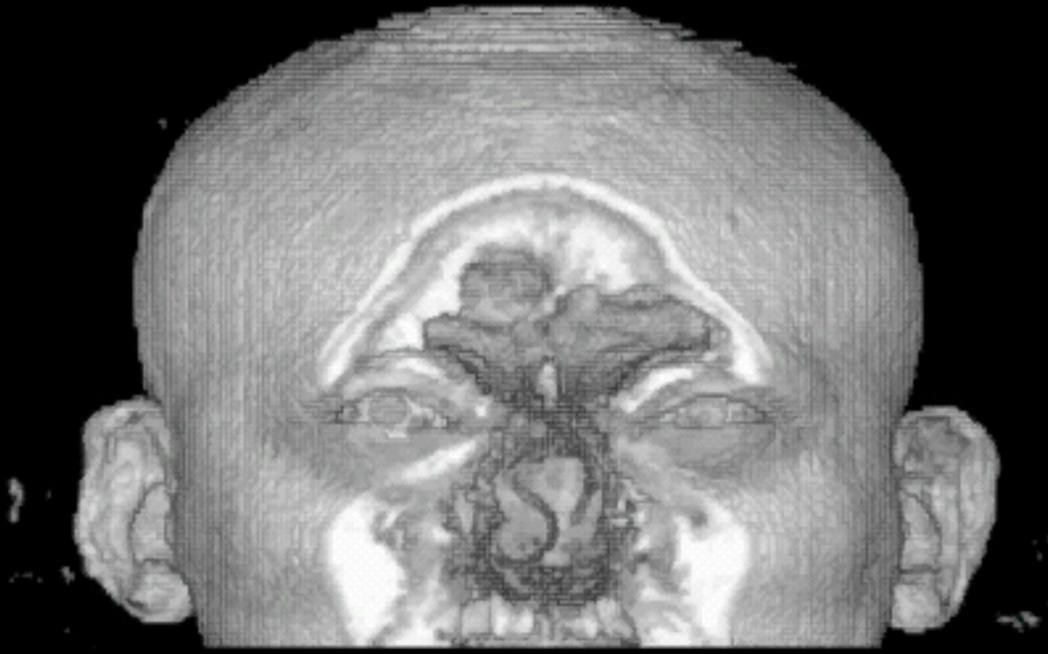
(see 12/31/08 Harvard Science & CfA press releases for details)

“Astronomical Medicine”

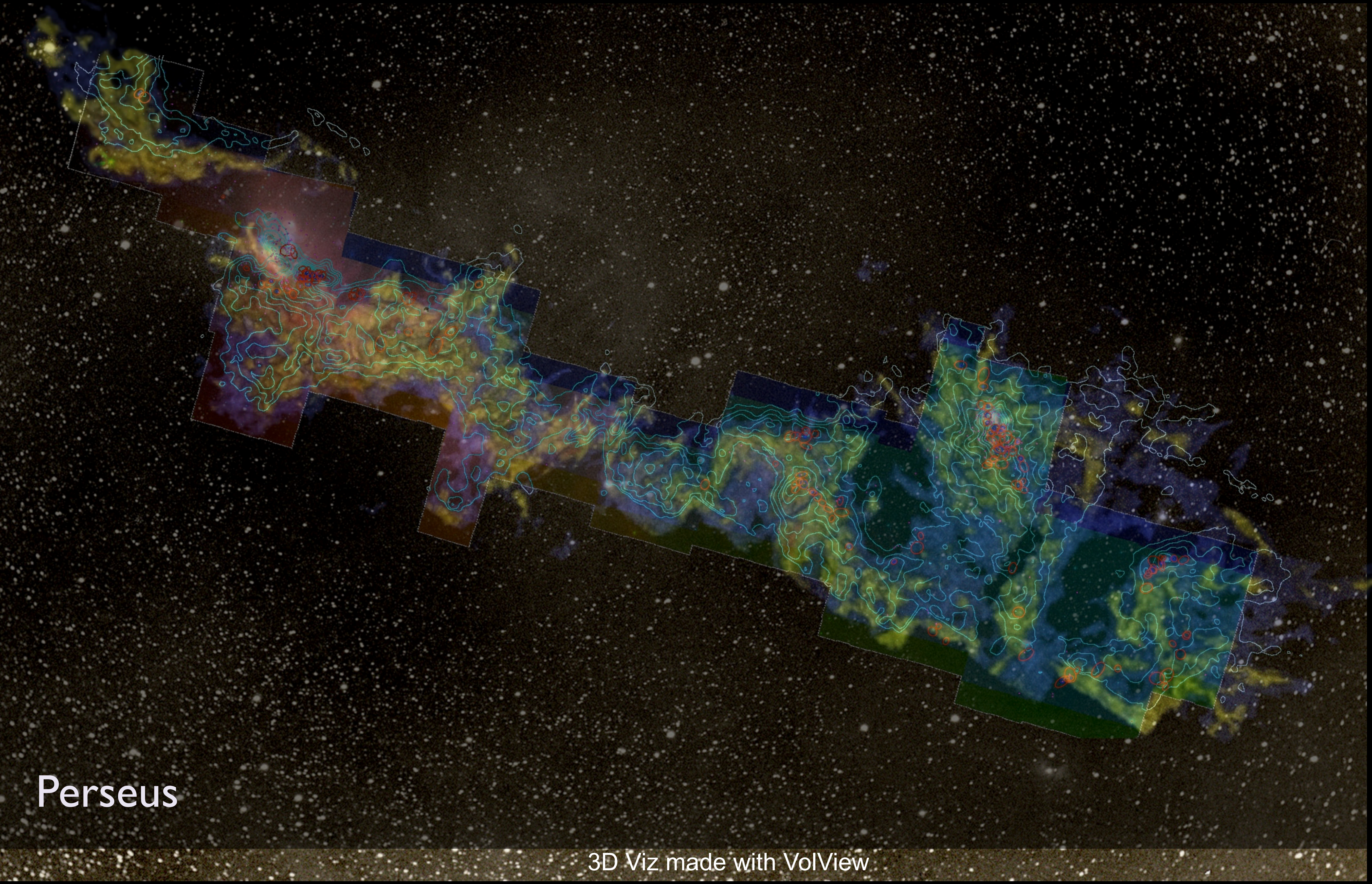
“PERSEUS”

“z” is line-of-sight velocity

“KEITH”



“z” is depth into head



3D Viz made with VolView

AstronomicalMedicine@IIC

COMPLETE

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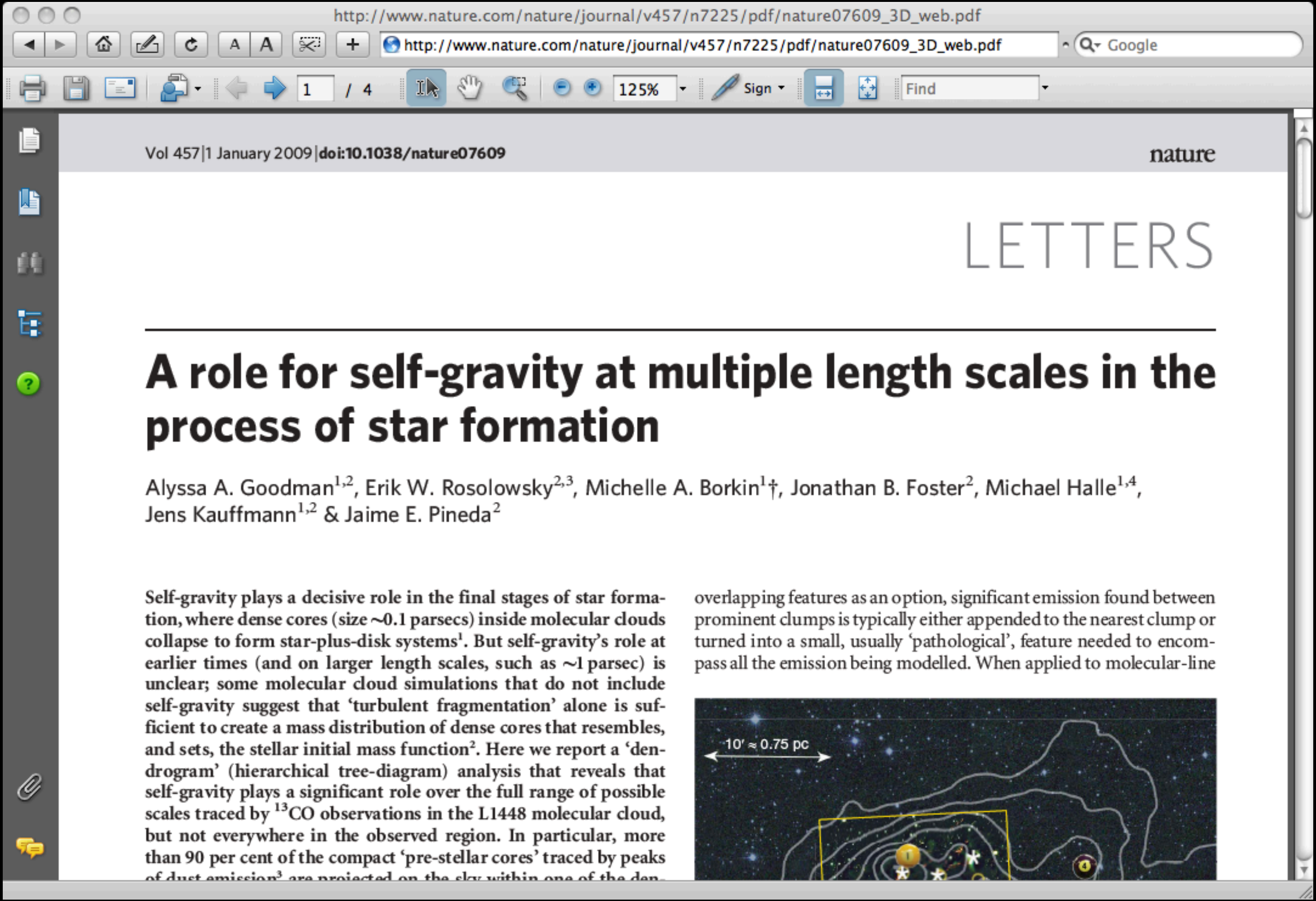

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LETTERS

A role for self-gravity at multiple length scales in the process of star formation

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Self-gravity plays a decisive role in the final stages of star formation, where dense cores (size ~0.1 parsecs) inside molecular clouds collapse to form star-plus-disk systems[1]. But self-gravity's role at earlier times (and on larger length scales, such as ~1 parsec) is unclear; some molecular cloud simulations that do not include self-gravity suggest that 'turbulent fragmentation' alone is sufficient to create a mass distribution of dense cores that resembles, and sets, the stellar initial mass function[2]. Here we report a 'dendrogram' (hierarchical tree-diagram) analysis that reveals that self-gravity plays a significant role over the full range of possible scales traced by ^{13}CO observations in the L1448 molecular cloud, but not everywhere in the observed region. In particular, more than 90 per cent of the compact 'pre-stellar cores' traced by peaks of dust emission[3] are projected on the sky within one of the den-

overlapping features as an option, significant emission found between prominent clumps is typically either appended to the nearest clump or turned into a small, usually 'pathological', feature needed to encompass all the emission being modelled. When applied to molecular-line

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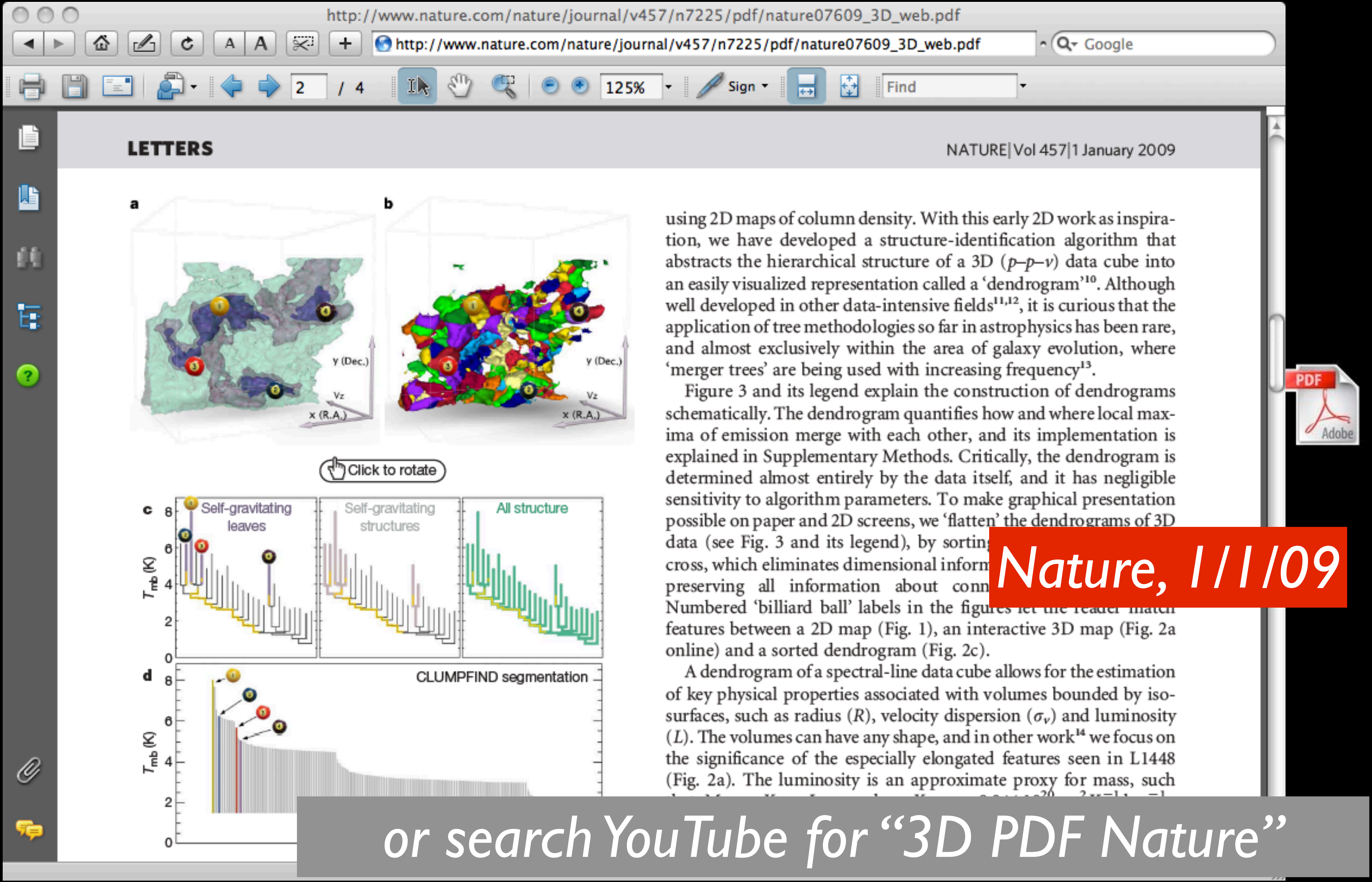

LETTERS

NATURE | Vol 457 | 1 January 2009

using 2D maps of column density. With this early 2D work as inspiration, we have developed a structure-identification algorithm that abstracts the hierarchical structure of a 3D (p–p–v) data cube into an easily visualized representation called a ‘dendrogram’[10]. Although well developed in other data-intensive fields[11,12], it is curious that the application of tree methodologies so far in astrophysics has been rare, and almost exclusively within the area of galaxy evolution, where ‘merger trees’ are being used with increasing frequency[13].

Figure 3 and its legend explain the construction of dendrograms schematically. The dendrogram quantifies how and where local maxima of emission merge with each other, and its implementation is explained in Supplementary Methods. Critically, the dendrogram is determined almost entirely by the data itself, and it has negligible sensitivity to algorithm parameters. To make graphical presentation possible on paper and 2D screens, we ‘flatten’ the dendrograms of 3D data (see Fig. 3 and its legend), by sorting
cross, which eliminates dimensional inform
preserving all information about conn
Numbered ‘billiard ball’ labels in the figu
features between a 2D map (Fig. 1), an interactive 3D map (Fig. 2a online) and a sorted dendrogram (Fig. 2c).

A dendrogram of a spectral-line data cube allows for the estimation of key physical properties associated with volumes bounded by isosurfaces, such as radius (R), velocity dispersion (σ_v) and luminosity (L). The volumes can have any shape, and in other work[14] we focus on the significance of the especially elongated features seen in L1448 (Fig. 2a). The luminosity is an approximate proxy for mass, such

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