

# COMP90054 — AI Planning for Autonomy

## 5. Width Based Planning

Searching for Novelty  
and How to Plan with Simulators

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  

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# Agenda

- 1 Width-Based Search
- 2 Balancing Exploration and Exploitation
- 3 Models and Simulators
- 4 Classical Planning with Simulators
- 5 Conclusion

# Structure

Planning is **PSPACE-complete**, but current planners can **solve most of benchmarks in a few seconds**

## Question:

- Can we explain why planners perform well?
- Can we characterize the line that separates ‘**easy**’ from ‘**hard**’ domains?

# Our Answer

complexity of a family of problems

Upper bound Complexity

A new width notion and planning algorithm exponential in problem width:

- Benchmark domains have **small width** when **goals** restricted to **single atoms**
- Joint goals **easy to serialize** into a sequence of single goals

Do you want Hard Problems?

- problems with **high atomic width** (apparently no benchmark in this class)
- **multiple goal** problems that are **not easy to serialize** (e.g. Sokoban)

## Definition: Novelty

The novelty is always the smallest value

**Key definition:** the **novelty**  $w(s)$  of a state  $s$  is the size of the **smallest subset of atoms in  $s$**  that is **true for the first time** in the search.

- e.g.  $w(s) = 1$  if there is **one** atom  $p \in s$  such that  $s$  is the first state that makes  $p$  true.  
check all the pairs
- Otherwise,  $w(s) = 2$  if there are **two** different atoms  $p, q \in s$  such that  $s$  is the first state that makes  $p \wedge q$  true.
- Otherwise,  $w(s) = 3$  if there are **three** different atoms...

check  $w(s)$  to the size of the number of facts  
=> biggest tuple we could have

if all tuples are seen  
=>  $w(s) = \text{number of facts} + 1$

# Iterated Width ( $IW$ )

## Algorithm

- $IW(k)$  = breadth-first search that prunes newly generated states whose  $novelty(s) > k$ .
- $IW$  is a sequence of calls  $IW(k)$  for  $i = 0, 1, 2, \dots$  over problem  $P$  until problem solved or  $i$  exceeds number of variables in problem  
Facts

## Properties

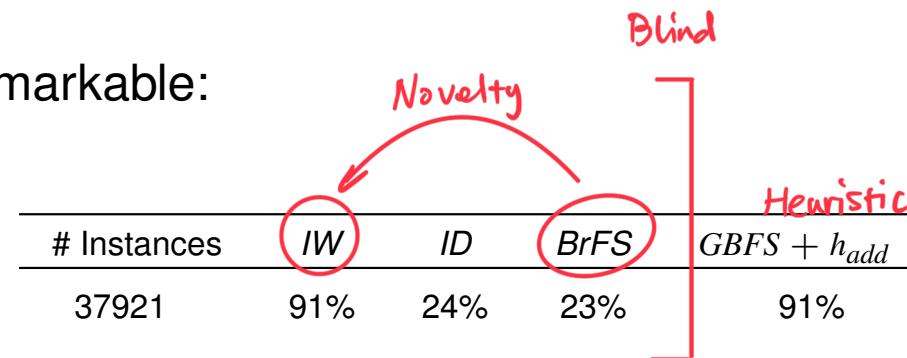
$IW(k)$  expands at most  $O(n^k)$  states, where  $n$  is the number of atoms.  
Facts

# Is IW any good in Classical Planning?

- **IW**, while simple and **blind**, is a pretty **good algorithm** over benchmarks when goals restricted to **single atoms**
- This is no accident, **width** of benchmarks domains is **small** for such goals

We tested domains from previous IPCs. For **each instance** with  $N$  goal atoms, we created  $N$  instances with a single goal

- Results quite remarkable:



# Why $IW$ does so well?

Key theory of  $IW(k)$  in terms of width:

## Properties

For problems  $\Pi \in \mathcal{P}$ , where  $width(\Pi) = k$ :

- $IW(k)$  solves  $\Pi$  in time  $O(n^k)$ ;
- $IW(k)$  solves  $\Pi$  optimally for problems with uniform cost functions
- $IW(k)$  is complete for  $\Pi$

## Theorem

*Blocks, Logistics, Gripper, and n-puzzle have a bounded width independent of problem size and initial situation, provided that goals are single atoms.*

In practice,  $IW(k \leq 2)$  solves 88.3% IPC problems with single goals:

# Instances	$k = 1$	$k = 2$	$k > 2$
37921	37.0%	51.3%	11.7%

# IW in Classical Planning?

**Primary question:** /W solves atomic goals, how do we extend the blind procedure to multiple atomic goals?

## Serialized Iterated Width (SIW)

- Simple way to **use  $IW$**  for solving real benchmarks  $P$  with **joint goals** is by simple form of “**hill climbing**” over goal set  $G$  with  $|G| = n$ , achieving atomic goals one at a time

(Loading state space)

# Serialized Iterated Width (SIW)

- **SIW uses IW** for both **decomposing** a problem into subproblems and for **solving** subproblems
- It's a **blind search** procedure, **no heuristic** of any sort, **IW does not even know next goal  $G_i$  "to achieve"**

Blind SIW better than GBFS +  $h_{add}$  !

## Summary (so far)

**$IW$ :** sequence of novelty-based pruned breadth-first searches

- **Experiments:** excellent when goals restricted to atomic goals
- **Theory:** such problems have low width  $w$  and  $IW$  runs in time  $O(n^w)$

**$SIW$ :**  $IW$  serialized, used to attain top goals one by one

- **Experiments:** faster, better coverage and much better plans than GBFS planner with  $h_{add}$
- **Intuition:** goals easy to serialize and have atomic low width  $w$

# Classical Planning

State-of-the-art methods for **satisficing planning** rely on:

- **heuristics** derived from problem
- plugged into **Greedy Best-First Search** (GBFS)
- extensions (like **helpful actions** and **landmarks**)

## Shortcoming of GBFS: Exploration and Exploitation

GBFS is **pure greedy “exploitation”**; often gets **stuck in local minima**

- Recent approaches improve performance by adding exploration

Exploration **required** for **optimal behavior** in RL and MCTS

- Such methods perform **flat exploration** that **ignores structure of states**

We study impact of **width-based exploration methods** that take structure of states into account

# Best-First Width Search (BFWS)

## BFWS( $f$ )

BFWS( $f$ ) for  $f = \langle w, f_1, \dots, f_n \rangle$  where  $w$  is a novelty-measure, is a plain best-first search where nodes are ordered in terms of novelty function  $w$ , with ties broken by functions  $f_i$  in that order.

**Basic** BFWS( $\langle w, h \rangle$ ) scheme obtained with  $\mathbf{h} = \mathbf{h}_{\text{add}}$  or  $\mathbf{h}_{\text{ff}}$ , and novelty-measure  $w = w_{\mathbf{h}}$ , where

- $w_h(s) = \text{size of smallest new tuple of atoms generated by } s \text{ for the first time in the search relative to previously generated states } s' \text{ with } h(s) = h(s')$ .

→ BFWS( $\langle w, h \rangle$ ) much better than purely greedy BFS( $h$ )

Some BFWS( $f$ ) variants yield state-of-the-art performance:

- 1st place in Agile track, Runner-Up Satisficing track IPC-2018
- more info: <https://ipc2018-classical.bitbucket.io/>

# Classical Planning

The status quo:

- Model usually represented in compact form (STRIPS, PDDL)



## Introduction & Motivation

For more than 40 years, research focused on **exploiting** information about **action preconditions and effects** in order to plan efficiently

- ▶ GPS, POP, GraphPlan, SAT, OBDD, heuristic-search planning, ...

We showed that same level of efficiency can be obtained with **simulators**: **without** a representation of **action preconditions and effects**

## Introduction & Motivation

This has been shown by:

- Developing a planner that uses action structure **only** to define
  - the set  $A(s)$  of **applicable actions** in state  $s$ , and
  - state **transition function**  $f(a,s)$

The **planner does not see action preconditions and effects** but just the functions  $A(s)$  and  $f(a,s)$

- We showed that its **performance matches** the performance of state of the art **planners that make use of PDDL** representations, over the existing PDDL benchmarks

**Many consequences follow from this radical departure**

# Modeling



# Modeling

Many problems fitting **classical planning** model but **difficult to describe in PDDL** are easily modeled now: Pacman, Tetris, Pong, etc.

- **Expressive language features** easily supported: functions, conditional effects, derived predicates, state constraints, quantification, ...
- Any element of the problem can be modeled through logical symbols attached to **external procedures** (e.g. C++).
- Action effects can be given as **fully-black-box procedure** taking the state as input.

# Introduction & Motivation

Declarative languages also have their **downsides**:

- **Model ≠ Language.** Many problems fit Classical Planning model, but hard to express in PDDL-like languages.
- Recent development of **simulation platforms** such as
  - ▶ Atari Learning Environment,
  - ▶ GVG-AI,
  - ▶ Universe, etc.

Need for planners that work **without complete declarative representations**.

## Algorithm: Simulated BFWS

Framework **Best-first width search (BFWS)**:

- Novelty measures  $w$  also used in best-first algorithms (BFWS)
- Best results when  $w$ -measures combined with goal directed heuristics  $h$   
**(Lipovetzky and Geffner, 2017)**
- BFWS( $h$ ) picks node from OPEN with least  $w_h$  measure, breaking ties with  $h$ 
  - $w_h(s) = k$  if  $s$  is first state to make some set of  $k$  atoms true, among those with heuristic  $h = h(s)$

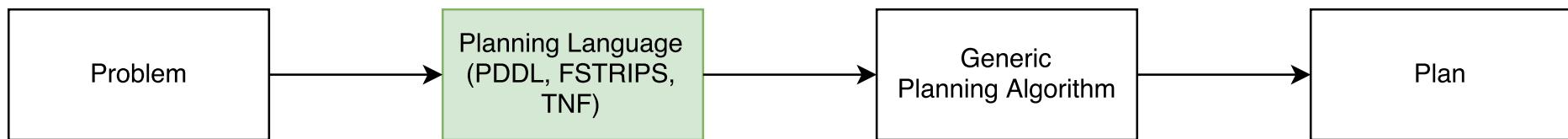
**BFWS( $h$ ) much better than standard BFS( $h$ )**

Use of heuristics couples algorithm with *declarative representations*.

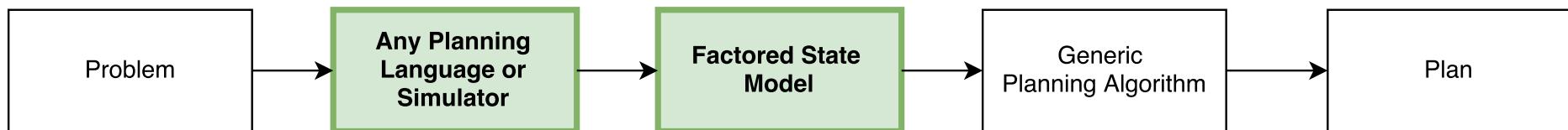
- ▶ In **(Frances et al. 2017)** we lift this requirement

## Implications: Modeling and Control

### ► Traditional toolchain



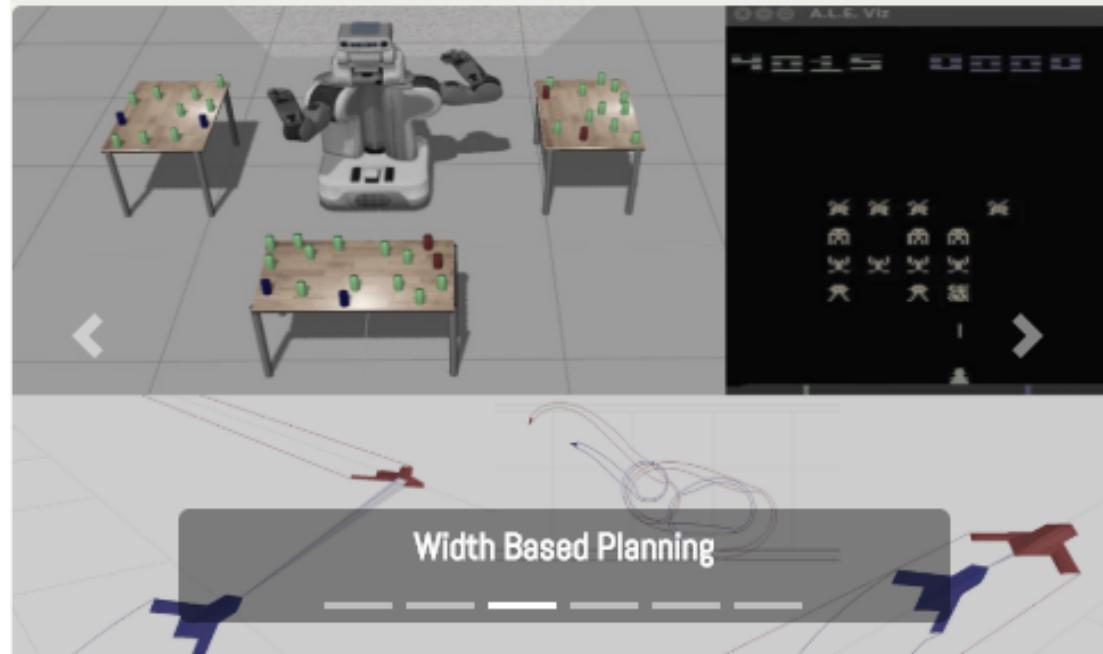
### ► Results suggest **alternative**



- No **need** for planning languages that reveal **structure** of actions (e.g. action preconditions and effects)
- **Not much** efficiency appears to be **lost** in **second** pathway

These algorithms open up **Exciting possibilities** for **modeling beyond PDDL**

# Width-Based planning over Simulators



## Challenges:

- Non-linear dynamics
- Perturbation in flight controls
- Partial observability
- Uncertainty about opponent strategy

# Classical Planning with Simulators

Can classical planners work without PDDL?



# Arcade Learning Environment

<http://www.arcadelearningenvironment.org/>

The Arcade Learning Environment (ALE) is a simple object-oriented framework that allows researchers and hobbyists to develop *AI agents for Atari 2600 games*.

Recent AI agents:

- ~> Reinforcement Learning and Deep Learning trained to learn a controller
- ~> Search algorithm as a lookahead for action selection

# Motivation

While planning is the [model-based approach](#) to control, planning research is heavily fragmented

- Many models (classical; MDPs, POMDPs; "logical" variants FOND and POND; time, resources, ..)
- Modeling languages vs. Use of Simulators
- Different communities (ICAPS-AAAI; NIPS-UAI-RL ..)

Best way to get communication across and to build on each others' work is [common benchmarks](#) and [environments](#) such as *ALE*

## ALE and Classical Planning

Planning setting in ALE is **deterministic** and initial state fully known

Yet classical planners can't be used

- no PDDL encoding
- no goals but rewards

→ *Bellemare et al.* consider Breadth-first Search (*BrFS*) and *MCTS* (*UCT*)

→ Still, "classical" planning algorithms such as *IW* can be applied almost off-the-shelf!

# *IW* in the Atari Games

- *IW*(1) used with the 128 variables (bytes) of 256 values each
- *IW*(1) generates then up to  $128 \times 256 \times 18$  (i.e, 589,824) states
  - Children in *IW*(1) generated in random order
  - Discount factor used  $\gamma = 0.995$
- Action leading to most rewarding *IW*(1)-path is executed

Width-Based Search  
○○○○○○○○

Balancing Exploration and Exploitation  
○○○

Models and Simulators  
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Classical Planning with Simulators  
○○○○○●○○○○

Conclusion  
○○

# IW Playing Atari!

(algorithms in action!)

# Freeway

$/W(1)$



UCT



# Experimental Results

Same setting from Bellemare et al:

- Games are played for 5 minutes maximum (18,000 frames)
- 2BFS and  $IW$  have a maximum lookahead budget of 150,000 simulated frames
- UCT has same budget by running 500 rollouts of depth 300
- Score is averaged among 5 runs per game

	$IW(1)$	2BFS	$BrFS$	UCT
# Times Best (54 games)	26	13	1	19
# Times Better than $IW$	–	16	1	19
# Times Better than 2BFS	34	–	1	25
# Times Better than UCT	31	26	1	–

## Search Tree Depths

- $BrFS$  search tree results in a lookahead of 0.3 seconds
- $IW(1)$  and 2BFS result in lookahead of up to 6–22 seconds

# IW vs DeepMind

## Lookahead Agents VS Learning Agents:

~ Still open how to compare them best as they solve different control problems, and different inputs (RAM vs Screen)

But, taking into account gameplay score:

~ IW outperforms DeepMind's algorithm in 45 out of 49 games

~ Similar results have been reported recently over Screen Inputs [AAAI 2018]

# ALE Wrap up

- *IW* makes use of the **state structure** (atoms) to order exploration
- *IW(1)* is a *BrFS* that **keeps states that generate new atoms**
- **Exploitation of this structure pays off in classical planning and ALE**
- First **classical planners using simulators**
- Youtube videos: ▶ Link <http://bit.ly/1EuCb9x>

# The Width Conspirators: What's next?

- Explore new **applications**: Social Sciences, Computational Sustainability, and any other fields rely on simulators
- Width-based for other **planning computational models**: Uncertainty, Beliefs, Multi-agent
- Devise new **algorithms** for real-time behavior
- Bridge connection between **Control, Planning and Learning**

Help us grow the boundaries of AI planning research!

# Resources

## Literature:

- <https://nirlipo.github.io/Width-Based-Planning-Resources/>

## LAPKT stands for the Lightweight Automated Planning ToolKit:

- <http://lapkt.org>

## IW-ALE, BFWS source code:

- <http://lapkt.org/index.php?title=Projects>

## Width-based in action featured in ICAPS-19:

- [https://icaps19.icaps-conference.org/!](https://icaps19.icaps-conference.org/)