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Master Thesis

An approach to solving object displacement problems

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Lübeck, June 17, 2014

Assertion

I assure that the following work is done independently with the use of only stated resources.

Lübeck, June 17, 2014

Kurzfassung

The scope of this thesis is the implementation and testing of algorithms to solve object displacement problems.

To achieve this the search space is divided into multiple cells to reduce its size. Furthermore instead of calculating the whole space at once, a local approach is used to only calculate the parts needed for the next search step. This needs a wide range of basic geometric and algebraic algorithms for object representation, collision detection and object translation/rotation.

On the resulting search space a simple and exchangable graph search algorithm is applied, which will give us a path in the object space from start configuration to the desired target configuration.

Abstract

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1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

1.1.1 Path planning in robotics

In robotics the path planning of a robot can be programmed as a fixed list of movements to be executed. This has multiple drawbacks as for every change in the environment the robot needs to manually be reprogrammed.

But what if we equip this robot with a camera that detects the shape of objects in the robots environment. This would give us a set of objects at certain position, a robot arm in a starting position and a target where the robots endeffector needs to work. If we would be able to solve this puzzle, we could direct the robot in a different way each time without the actual need to access its software.

1.1.2 Geometric riddles in gaming

Solving geometric riddles is a amazingly fun task for a human. This is the reason many games simply consists of such riddles ranking from easy to hard in difficulty. But even the easiest riddle for a human proposes a big challenge for a simple algorithm that searches through the possible ways of solving it. Even more complicated is the generation of such riddles. Even for the human brain this task can be exceedingly stressful.

Now, if there would be a possibility to check if such a riddle has a solution, there would be the option to generate them randomly and check for feasibility. This would release the developers of the need to manually create each riddle. Also the consumers, in this case the players, would have a never ending stream of new and different riddles to solve.

1.2 Idea

As the representation behind these two cases is the same, for simplification purposes we break the riddles down into two dimensional object displacement problems. The following riddles shall provide simple example of the problem:

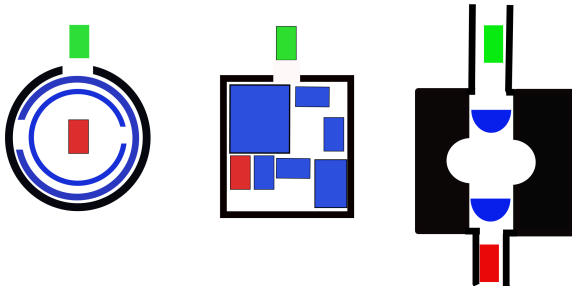


Figure 1.1: *riddle 1 with circles , riddle 2 with boxes , riddle 3 with 2 half-circles*

The riddle is solved, if the red box matches the green one. Blue objects are movable and black ones are stationary. The stationary ones will be referred to as rims hereafter.

As a human the way to solve those is quite obvious. The first riddle is solved by rotating the blue objects, the second through translation. The third needs both ways to be solved.

If we want to solve this with an algorithm, we would need to consider each objects collision with the other objects and the rim. Also we would need to find a way to express the current configuration consisting of position (x,y) and rotation (ϕ) and the direction the main object needs to take. A simple idea would be to

1. generate all valid configurations per object in regard to the stationary obstacles as a configuration space
2. Create one collision space per object for collision with every other object.
3. Subtract the collision space from the configuration space to get valid space in regard to all obstacles for one object.
4. Divide the space in cells and locate the valid ones.
5. Build a graph out of this starting position by adapting the space after each step.
6. Search in that graph to get path from start to target point.

The target point would then be a simple configuration vector holding each position of each

object. A user defined distance function between start and target point in that space can then be used as heuristic in the graph search (e.g. $h(start, target) = ||(x_{start} - x_{target}, y_{start} - y_{target})||$).

2 Enviroment and basics

2.1 Programming tools

As the target of this thesis is a mere proof of concept, the programming language of choice is matlab [2]. This is a reasobable decision because in the matlab language a huge part of the needed functionality concerning simple mathematical functions is already implemented and easy to use.

Pros:

- easy to use mathematical function
- fast and easy way to enter data
- good and simple ways of debugging and locating errors

Cons:

- slow computation speed
- needs translation in other language (e.g. c++) for further use

As versioning tool git [1] is used together with www.github.com as an open source storage plattform for the resulting code.

2.2 Basics

For better understanding of the following chapters the central mathematical formulas are repeated here.

2.2.1 basic vector math

If the objects are represented as a list of corner points, vector math comes in handy when describing the borders of the object. Lets say we have a simple object A defined by the following list:

$$A = (0, 0; 2, 0; 2, 2; 0, 2)$$

Each pair x,y defines one corner of A and the points are ordered to travel along the border of A counterclockwise. The lines connecting these points will be called the borders of A. They are calculated by substracting the points from each other such that the vectors point along the border clockwise. This leads to:

$$A_{vec} = (2, 0; 0, 2; -2, 0; 0, -2)$$

Next will be the calculation of the angle beetween two vectors a and b. This is done by taking a reference vector , for example the x-axis $r=(1,0)$, calculating the angle to that and building the difference in angle. This way we can determine an angle beetween the vectors a and b where the sign of the angle tells us which vector lies "below" the other.

The formula for this is:

$$\phi = \text{anglebeetweenvectorsformula}$$

2.2.2 convex hull

Next is the calculation of the convex hull of an object for another object. Lets take object A from before and another object B defined by:

$$B = (0, 0; 1, 0; 1, 2; 0, 2)$$

Furthermore we define the center of these objects to be $M_A = (1,1)$ and $M_B = (0.5,1)$ The convex hull for A to B is calculated after the formula

$$\text{hull} = \text{formula}$$

Basically this means we add the points of A shifted with $-M_A$ and mirrored at M_A to each point of B shifted with $-M_B$ and then reshifted with M_B to get a list C_{temp} of $4 \cdot 4 = 16$ points.

$$C_{temp} = \begin{pmatrix} -1, & -1; & 1, & -1; & 1, & 1; & -1, & 1; \\ 0, & -1; & 2, & -1; & 2, & 1; & 0, & 1; \\ 0, & 1; & 2, & 1; & 2, & 3; & 0, & 3; \\ -1, & 1; & 1, & 1; & 1, & 3; & -1, & 3 \end{pmatrix}$$

Each line represents one point of B with the points of A added. By choosing the outer points from C_{temp} and put them in C , such that no point from C_{temp} is still outside C we will get an object C which defines the space around B which the object A can not enter or they will collide.

$$C = (-1, -1; 2, -1; 2, 3; -1, 3)$$

2.2.3 linear programming

Following the convex hull, as a way to actually compute if a collision took place or not, we use linear programming. For that we represent the convex hull of object A to object B $Hull_{A.B}$ with its vector representation.

Now we take the center of A and check if its inside the convex hull.

$$A(1, :) + A_{vec}(1, :)$$

3 Implementation

3.1 Common definitions and representation

As the exact representation of our objects should not matter, we will only define the common points needed for a clear communication of the stated problem.

The algorithm's aim is to tell if there is a solution possible and, if so, present it. The object which needs to be moved from a starting configuration to a target configuration will be named main object M . Other movable objects are obstacles named Ob_i and the stationary objects are called rims R_i . This will be combined to the sets $O = \{M\} \cup \{Ob_i | i \in \mathbb{N}\}$ and $R = \{R_i | i \in \mathbb{N}\}$.

Each object O_A contains some data for representing its shape stored under $O_A.data$. Furthermore the configuration of O_A is given by the vector (x_A, y_A, ϕ_A) and stored under $O_A.mid$ as the middle/reference point for said object where x_A and y_A gives the point around which the object will be rotated by ϕ_A . By subtraction of the first two dimensions occupied by R from the possible space O_i per object in O , and, if we divide the space in two, selecting the one in which $O_i.mid$ lies at the start, we get a valid space C_{O_i-R} for the object O_i to be moved in (not taking into account other objects). This space is a simple 3 dimensional space with x_i, y_i and ϕ_i as base.

But as there is the need to check for collision with ALL other objects $O' = \{O_j, | j \neq i \wedge j \in \mathbb{N}\}$ we need to increase the dimensions of all spaces C_{O_i-R} by the number of objects in O' . Also for each set j of dimensions (x_j, y_j, ϕ_j) added, we will need to subtract the current position of the corresponding object O_j from the space, such that all collision points are removed from C_{O_i-R} . This will give us the configuration space for object O_i , C_{O_i} .

The solution can then be found by searching for a path in this configuration space for the main object M from start to target. The way the objects are represented determines the way of calculating collision and the setup of the configuration space. In the following part a way of representing the objects with points will be used.

3.2 Objects as point list

One of the possible ways of describing an object in a two dimensional setting would be an ordered list of corner points. Together with an anchor point we can calculate all transformations needed. To see if this representation would work we take a short look at the algorithm described in 1.2 and sketch a solution to each step.

1. Generate C_{O_i-R} : By identifying the main outer rim R_{mo} and computing its inner hull for O_i the space C_{O_i} is build. For all other rims R_j computing the convex hull with O_i and subtracting them from C_{O_i} leads to C_{O_i-R} .
2. Generate $C_{O_i-O_j}$: Calculate the convex hull from O_i to each other object O_j .
3. Generate C_{O_i} : Substraction of $C_{O_i-R} - C_{O_i-O_j}$ for all $O_j \in O \wedge j \neq i$.
4. Divide search space in cells: By extending the vectors connecting the convex hull in $C_{O_i-O_j}$ we get a separation of the space in C_{O_i} in multiple parts. Each step is a translation of the object O_i from one cell to another. The neighbour cells can be identified by iterationing over the objects O_j and calculating the nearest crossing along (x, y) with the extended vectors of its convex hull.
Rotations are represented as a jump from one hyperplane to the next in search direction. There are multiple problems with rotation in this representation, that will be discussed later.
5. Construct the search graph: While moving along those cells, we adapt C_{O_i} for each $O_i \in O$ each step. These cells are then added to the graph.
6. Search for target: Again independently of the object representation a search can then be applied to the resulting graph.

So far this representation seems like a good choice in multiple ways with some drawbacks on the other hand.

Pros:

- Simple and intuitive representation of object itself
- Easy and fast to compute concerning the transformation of an object (translation, rotation)

Cons:

- Rotation needs discrete steps along the config dimensions ϕ_i , therefore more exact calculations lead to higher need in computation power.
- The more corners an object has, the more points its convex hull with other object will have. One point more in object O_i can lead to n more points in $C_{O_i-O_j}$ with n being the number of points in O_j . As we use the vectors connecting the points in $C_{O_i-O_j}$, n more cells will arise in the search space.

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List of Tables

bibliography

- [1] CHACON, S. *Pro Git*, July 2009.
- [2] MATHWORKS, INC. *Matlab Language Reference Manual*.

