

**PROPOSAL:  
LEARNING DYNAMIC MOTOR SKILLS  
FOR VIRTUAL AND REAL HUMANOIDS**

A Thesis Proposal  
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by

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**PROPOSAL:**  
**LEARNING DYNAMIC MOTOR SKILLS**  
**FOR VIRTUAL AND REAL HUMANOIDS**

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## SUMMARY

As technology of computer animation and robotics advances, controlling highly dynamic motions has been a great milestone for both virtual and real humanoid characters. However, developing controllers for dynamic motor skills is yet a challenging problem which usually requires substantial amount of design efforts and optimization time due to its complexity. In this proposal, we introduce a set of technique for training various highly dynamic motor skills, such as jumping, rolling, vaulting, and landing, to virtual characters and real robots.

First, we introduce new algorithms to generate falling and landing motions, which are essential motor skills to ensure the safety of human and robots. We propose an online algorithm to control falling and landing motions of virtual characters from a wide range of heights and initial speeds, which can potentially cause huge damages. With the suggested algorithm, we demonstrate that simple momentum planning with the proxy model of inertia and feedback-based rules can generate the natural landing motions without large stresses on the joints. Inspired by falling of a virtual character, we develop an optimization algorithm for multi-contact falling motions of a real robot for minimizing the damage at the impact. Unlike the existing techniques which usually consider the desired contacts as invariant features, we search over a sequence of contacts to find the best falling motion which can handle a wider range of situations.

Second, we propose a human-in-the-loop (HITL) system to develop dynamic controllers under the guidance of a human coach. In this system, the user can provide a sequence of high-level instructions to iteratively train dynamic controllers of characters as if coaching a human trainee. To facilitate the mapping between high-level instructions and control variables, we introduce a new representation of dynamic

controllers, the “motor tree”, which also enables flexible re-assembly and efficient re-optimization by preserving the invariant features of motor skills. Further, the optimization process is accelerated by utilizing the failed previous trials. Using our proposed system, we also train a real robot to perform dynamic motor skills such as rolling under enough consideration on noises over control and simulation.

By incorporating the propose techniques, we can produce highly-dynamic motions of virtual characters and real robots.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

[1]

Performing highly dynamic motions with agility and grace has been one of the greatest challenges in sports, computer animation, and robotic. A wide variety of athletic, such as acrobatic or free running, demonstrate the efficient and artistic movements which involve the abrupt changes of momentum and contacts. Furthermore, these motor skills are transferred to virtual characters in animation and game to express the intention of designers and react to user interactions. Robotics, another application of dynamic controllers, also started to tackle the agile movements and demonstrated running, jumping, and landing motions with real hardwares. Despite the recent progress, learning dynamic motor skills still remains a very difficult problem because it needs to execute the task with great agility, ensure the safety, and demonstrate the self-expression.

In fact, developing dynamic controllers for virtual characters and real robots can be considered as related problems which can benefit each other. Since the control problems in two domains have shared properties, such as non-linearity, high-dimension, and discontinuity, an algorithm developed in one domain can be transferred to the other domain. However, control of real robots is more constrained due to the sensor uncertainty and hardware limitations which usually requires more robustness than control of virtual characters. Therefore, developing an algorithm in virtual environment to prove its full capability and transferring it to real hardwares would be a nice research direction, which is adopted in this proposal.

In computer animation and robotics community, various categories of algorithms

have been applied to control virtual and real characters. For generating a sequence of dynamic motion, two approaches has been frequently applied to control problems: tracking the reference motion, or solving the space-time optimization problem under the physics constraints. Both methods demonstrated that a variety of motions can be achieved by solving the optimization problem which considers the entire sequence of motions. However, the optimization over the entire motion usually requires a long optimization time and further falls short of abilities for adapting the motion to new environments. On the other hand, abstract model based controllers can be interactively adapted to a wide range of situations by capturing the essential features of the dynamic motion. This approach shows the robust control over various motions, such as walking, balancing, and falling, but hard to consider the very detailed features such as the exact boundary of characters or a sequence of contacts. A sampling-based optimization for the parameterized controllers has proven effective for optimizing the motion within a realistic simulation environment, but it also takes a long time to be optimized, especially when the objective function is parameterized or concatenated for long term goals.

In this proposal, we introduce a set of techniques to expedite the learning process of dynamic controllers for various dynamic motor skills. We first introduce a natural and safe landing controller for the characters and robots, which is essential for highly dynamic motions. After that, we propose an interactive syste to design dynamic controllers for humanoids. The rest of sections are organized as follows:

### ***1.1 Organizations***

- **Optimization of Falling and Landing motions** In this proposal, we tackle the problem of controlling safe falling and landing motion for virtual characters and robots, which is a fundamental motor skill because highly dynamic motions involve the abrupt changes of contacts and can cause huge damages on the body

parts. While absorbing the shock at the impact, a successful landing controller also should be able to maintain readiness for the next action by managing the momentum properly. For the virtual character, we introduce a fast and robust optimization algorithm for controlling falling and landing motions of virtual characters from a wide range of heights and initial speeds, while reducing joint stress. Further, we develop a safe falling algorithm for a robot by planning a sequence of multiple contacts, which endures larger external perturbations comparing to the existing methods.

- **Human-guided iterative framework for training dynamic motions** Also, we introduce an iterative training system for dynamic motor skills inspired by human coaching techniques, which uses human-in-the-loop (HITL) optimization for interactive training. In this system, the user only needs to provide a primitive initial controller and high-level, human-readable instructions as if coaching a human trainee. The virtual character interprets the provided instructions, accumulate the knowledge from the human coach, and iteratively improves its motor skills by optimizing control parameters. We propose a new hierarchical representation of controllers, the “motor tree” for interpreting the instructions and accumulating the knowledge on motions. In addition, we develop a new sampling-based optimization method, Covariance Matrix Adaptation with Classification (CMA-C), which efficiently solves the constrained problem by estimating the infeasible region from bad samples. The system is further extended by considering the hardware limitations and uncertainties to support training dynamic motions for robots. With the proposed system, we demonstrate the design process of complex dynamic controllers including jumps, vaults, rolls, and flips.

## CHAPTER II

### ITERATIVE CONTROLLER DESIGN

Resembles learning by demonstration,

#### ***2.1 System Overview***

coaching and training

#### ***2.2 Controller***

Our controller produces a torque

#### ***2.3 Instruction***

our instruction are following:



## CHAPTER III

### TIMELINE FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH

- 2014, Apr: present proposal to committee
- 2014, Apr - May: setup a framework for real robots
- 2014, May - Sep: working on the robot falling project
- 2014, Sep: submit the robot falling paper to ICRA 2014
- 2014, Sep - Jul: working on the robot learning project
- 2015, May - Jul: write thesis
- 2015, Jul: defense thesis
- 2015, Sep: submit the robot learning project to ICRA 2015

## REFERENCES

- [1] FITTS, P. M. and POSNER, M. I., “Human performance,” 1967.