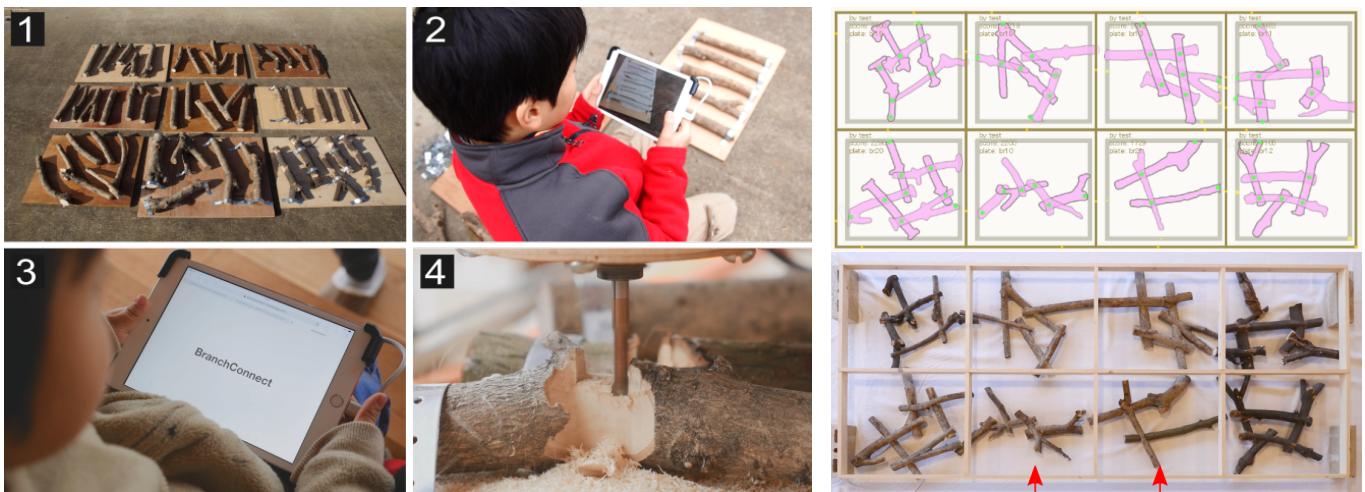


# Participatory Layout Design-Fabrication with Native Forms of Natural Materials



**Figure 1:** Left: an overview of the workflow: 1. fix branches on plates. 2. scan the plates and upload the model. 3. play the game with scanned branches. 4. fabricate joineries by a CNC router. Right top: branch layouts designed by multiple users. Red arrows indicate layouts by participants in the workshop. Right bottom: the fabricated 2D fence (2m x 0.9m). Each pair of branches is connected with rigid lapped joinery.

## Abstract

Diverse natural materials such as stones and woods have been used as architectural elements, preserving their native forms since primitive shelters, however, the use of them in modern buildings is limited due to their irregular properties. In this paper, we take the diversity as playful inputs for design task, and present our game-based design-fabrication platform for customized architectural elements. Taking tree branches as a material with native forms, our online game *BranchConnect* enables users to design 2D networks of branches and fabricate it by a CNC router. The game considers fabrication constraints such as limitations with ordinal 3-axis CNC routers. Each connection has a customized unique joinery adapted to native forms of branches. The scoring system of the game guides users to design structurally sound solutions with given branches. Together with low-cost mobile scanning devices, users with diverse contexts can contribute to design and fabrication process not only as a game user, but also from collecting branches around their physical environments and uploading them to our online platform. For validating our process, we conducted a workshop with end-users (children and their parents). They collected branches in a nearby forest and contributed to design/fabricate a 2D fence with our system.

**Keywords:** radiosity, global illumination, constant time

**Concepts:** •Computing methodologies → Image manipulation; Computational photography;

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## 1 Introduction

Modern buildings are characterized by its uniformity; built upon the same principle of construction system, consisting of standardized building component and its assembly process. The standardized construction system is favored because of its efficiency in design and production. Each component satisfies specified structural performance, thus the assembled resulting structure can be analyzed systematically. On the other hand, excessive standardization converged buildings into similar materials and details, resulting in the detached design from built environment. Reacting on the issue, designers and architects actively use local materials not only as inspirational sources, but also as a catalyst of their design to the local context [Oliver 1997].

Since primitive shelters and huts, traditional construction has used locally found natural materials directly as they are found [Weston 2003]. Such a direct use can not compete with highly standardized materials and construction system, however, the uniqueness of native forms is a valuable quality which is lacking in standardized materials. As the material is locally obtained, building and living get much closer, thus people using the building can easily commit design and fabrication, fostering the sense of belonging to the community. Locally obtained materials can easily connect design and the context of built environment in this way, but their irregular properties limit the use of them in modern buildings. Traditionally, craftsman has taken care irregular natural materials varying their native forms and dynamically design the global design by considering individual material properties [Pye 1968]. Such a task is difficult to be automated and these skills are developed through years of training, thus the use of native forms typically costs more than standardized construction system.

This paper aims to make the above-mentioned qualities of materials with native forms more accessible by digital technologies. We use locally obtained branches which can be found almost everywhere not only in country-side but also in urban environment such as parks

and along streets. Public service takes care of these branches: annual pruning, storing, and chipping or burning with some costs. The size of branches (from 5 -30 cm in diameter) is too small for furniture or other structural applications. It is a challenge for digital design and fabrication to utilize the diverse branches in meaningful ways. High-precision but low-cost scanning devices and personal digital fabrication machines make it possible to analyze and control natural materials with diverse native forms.

The key technical difficulty of materials with natives forms is design. Optimization is a straightforward approach: minimize an energy function which integrates structural and fabrication costs. This approach, however, is limited to particular design scenario with specific materials. Furthermore, the concept of optimum solution is well suited to goals such as efficiency or low-cost, but these goals are not the qualities materials with natives forms can compete with standardized construction systems. Instead, we take humans in our scan-design-fabricate workflow not only to solve the design problem, but also to provide an opportunity for people to participate in the workflow. Traditionally, in case of constructing public and symbolic buildings, such as church, people in a community took initiatives from fund raising to design, or even in construction process.

In this paper, we report our case study to design and fabricate an architectural element out of irregularly shaped branches, using our humans-in-the-loop system. We developed an online platform where users can post branches found at hand, and design with them through the game *BranchConnect*. The game system itself helps users to design valid branch layouts and enable them to fabricate customized joineries to connect them together without screws and adhesives. The design of our joinery extends the traditional orthogonal lap-joints to various angles within a range, freeing the diverse forms of woods from orthogonal connections. Physically collected branches are digitally scanned and stored in a cloud database *BranchCollect*, and offline application *Branch Importer* analyzes forms of branches and upload to the database. The simple visual feedback and scoring system of the game guide users to valid solutions, which are further inspected by an offline application *G-Code Generator* for CNC milling process. The game system and developed import/export applications are currently limited to branches, however, the principle of human-in-the-loop for design is applicable for other kinds of materials with diverse irregular forms. We hope our method sheds lights on materials such as waste from demolition of buildings for various design applications.

In summary, our contributions are

- a workflow enabling to take natural materials with native forms as design components.
- an online game-based approach to participatory design-fabrication.
- an algorithm to generate customized non-orthogonal joineries which are fabricatable by a CNC router.

## 2 Related Work

3D printers and CNC routers made digital fabrication more accessible, and pre-fabricated customized building components are often used in buildings nowadays [Knaack et al. 2012]. According to the theory by Pye [1968], these components are processed from highly standardized material, thus its digital fabrication process is “workmanship with certainty”; a batch process of reading G-Code and strict execution of the code. On the other hand, as “workmanship with risks” in digital fabrication, interactive fabrication enables machines to pick up uncertain happenings and react on it [Willis et al.

2011]. Mueller and her colleagues developed interactive laser cutting, taking user inputs and recognizing placed objects in a fabrication scene [Mueller et al. 2012]. While their system interprets objects as simple platonic geometry, our work interacts with the native forms of irregularly shpaed branches. Crowdsourced Fabrication project took advantage of humans-in-the-loop in their fabrication system [Lafreniere et al. 2016]. On the other hand, our work puts emphasis on crowd-sourced design as a socially networked fabrication. As a crowdsourced design system, Jerry et. al., developed a platform for light users to design trees and plants [Talton et al. 2009]. Our work also developed online collaborative design platform but directly linked to the real-world.

There are few works that take natural materials with native forms as design components. Schindler and his colleagues used digitally scanned wood branches and used them for furniture and interior design elements [Schindler et al. 2014]. Monier and colleagues virtually generated irregularly shaped branch-like components and explored designs of large scale structure [Monier et al. 2013]. Using larger shaped forked tree trunks, *Wood Barn* project designed and fabricated custom joineries to construct a truss-like structure[Mairs 2016]. *Smart Scrap* project digitally measured lime stone leftover slates from a quarry and digitally generated assembly pattern of slates [Greenberg et al. 2010]. In industry, recognition of irregularly shaped objects is essential for waste management. *ZenRobotics* developed a system that sorts construction and demolition waste by picking objects on a conveyor belt using robotic hands [Lukka et al. 2014]. For factory automation purpose, there is a system that recognizes irregularly shaped objects and sort them into a container [Sujan et al. 2000]. While these projects demonstrated the capability of digital fabrication processes to handle irregularly shaped materials, design process with native natural materials is still dependent on experts.

Cimerman discussed architectural design practices that took computer-mediated participatory (architectural) design [Cimerman 2000]. He mentioned three motivations of digital participatory design:

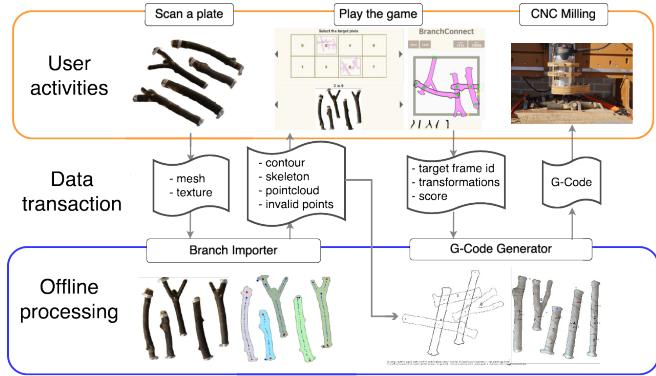
- Including stakeholders in creation of one’s environment.
- Experimenting diverse design tastes from multiple point of views.
- Solving complex design tasks with full of diverse solutions.

Opening database of available local materials, people with various backgrounds can involve in design process, which could lower the cost of design fee with natural materials with native forms. For example, *Nano-Doc* took gamification approach to search valid nanoparticle designs against tumors out of infinite design space [Hauert et al. ]. *DrawAFriend* has developed an online game to collect big-data for drawing applications which assist humans with auto-stroke assistance [Limpaecher et al. 2013]. While these works developed games for collecting valuable data for solving medical or engineering problems, our game is served as a collaborative design platform, aiming to solve the socio-cultural issues in modern buildings such as generic design and detached context.

## 3 Workflow

As illustrated in the left of Figure 1, our workflow starts from physically collecting branches. The collected branches are uploaded to cloud database by *Branch Importer*, and served to the online game-based design application *BranchConnect*. The game system uses skeletons for its joint detection process, which works on browsers on laptop computers or mobile touch devices. As in the right of 1, users can explore a global design with multiple branch layouts.

Once the global design is fixed, designed layouts are further inspected by *G-Code Generator*, which generates customized joinerries for CNC milling. After finishing the milling process, users physically assemble branches and complete the fabrication process. The pipeline of the workflow is illustrated in the Figure 2. In this section, we introduce two steps in the pipeline: Digital Model Acquisition and Fabrication. As for the game system, please refer Section 4.



**Figure 2:** A pipeline from model acquisition to fabrication.

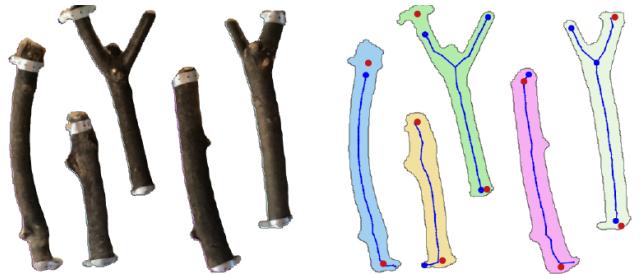
### 3.1 Digital Model Acquisition

Our system takes textured mesh model or point cloud with colored vertices. As complete mesh model provides more robust results with 3D shapes of branches, we describe our process based on mesh model as an input. There are various methods and software available for scanning 3D models. As for scanning setup, we describe in the Section 5. Taking mesh model with colored texture, our *Branch Importer* provides functions such as object detection, skeleton extraction, branch type classification, and fixture point setting.

The scanned result is a mesh model representing branches with a fixed plate. The system first identifies branches by applying simple height threshold, and then applies contour detection (we currently use *findContour* in OpenCV<sup>1</sup>). The obtained 2D contours are used for extracting skeletons and clustering point cloud in the mesh model. Contours are triangulated and skeleton points are extracted from middle points on edges of triangles. These middle points are compared with top view image from OpenCV. If the point is inside of a contour, the middle point is counted as a valid point. After extracting valid middle points, the connectivity of skeletons is analyzed. In case grafting branch is detected, a new skeleton sub-branch is added. The result is shown in Figure 3. Metal fixture locations are confirmed by simple mouse-clicks and set as invalid points. The acquired information is stored in a cloud database.

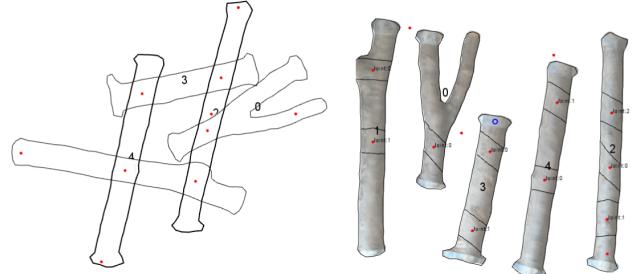
### 3.2 Fabrication

After a design is selected for fabrication, the validity of the design is further inspected by a high-resolution model. The *G-Code Generator* displays joinerries and milling paths on scanned orientations. In case joinerries are invalid with the high-resolution model, a layout can be easily modified with simple mouse inputs (see Figure 4). Users can also change milling parameters such as offset ratio for the side cuts, milling bit diameter, depth of joinerries, cutting speed, moving height and so forth. After confirming the fabrication settings and milling paths, it generates G-Code.



**Figure 3:** An interface of *Branch Importer*. Left: a top ortho-view image of textured mesh model. Right: Extracted skeletons are shown with blue dots. The beginning of skeletons is shown bigger dots, and the red dots are invalid points defined by a user.

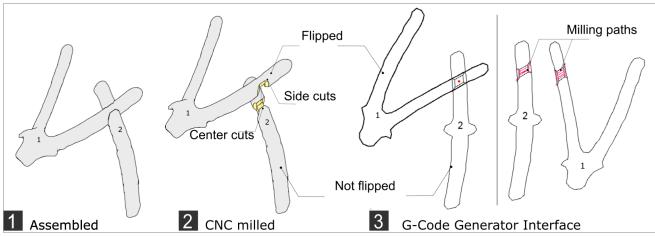
Some fabrication factors such as invalid points due to metal fixtures and flipped (further described in Section 4.2) are already considered by *Branch Importer* and the game system respectively. In this section, we describe the process of joinery generation. Each joinery's geometry is parametrically modeled with two planar surfaces on the sides of branches (side cuts) and one planar top surface (center cuts) (see Figure 5.2). Side cuts have wedged corners for smooth assembly process. The geometry creates rigid joints with irregularly shaped sections of branches.



**Figure 4:** Interface of *G-Code Generator*. Left: a layout defined by a user. The calculated joinerries are displayed. Right: an original orientation of a scanned plate with joinerries.

Similar to the joint searching process with skeletons, the *G-Code Generator* searches a set of four closest points from high-resolution contours, expecting that every intersected contour has four curves. After finding the four closest points, it trims two curves from each contour of branch. (two from intersecting branch and two from intersected branch) at each joint. The trimmed contours are transformed to the original scanned orientation and used for generating milling paths. Two curves from an intersected branch are used for generating side cuts milling paths, which are inwardly offset paths of the original branch contours. Height of center cuts is half of branch diameter. The diameter as the joint is calculated with the contour. We compare this value with actual height from the stored point cloud. In case of under-cuts, the system detects different values and adjust the center cuts according to the recalculated diameter.

<sup>1</sup>Open Source Computer Vision Library: <http://opencv.org/>



**Figure 5:** An example of intersected pair: 1. an assembled pair of branches. 2. branches after the center and side cuts are milled 3. left: a layout defined by a user right: the original orientations of branches with generated milling paths with red color.

## 4.1 System Overview

There are many collision detection libraries available, however, our game needs to detect intersected branch pairs, thus surface contact detection is overkill for our application. Also most branches come with free-form concave shapes, thus further geometric preparation such as convex decomposition is necessary for using these libraries. For fast and robust intersection detection, our system extensively uses down-sampled skeletons of branches.

Hubbard and Philip developed collision detection by representing an object with hierarchical 3D spheres aligned on a skeleton [Hubbard 1996]. Our system takes similar approach but limited in 2D, but more focused on searching fabricatable joints. In the game, simplified skeletons are used to find the pair of closest skeleton points between two branches. When a branch is selected, it is counted as an active, and the system searches the closest skeleton point from skeletons of other branches. More precise joint calculation with higher resolution is further described in the next section.

A joint is created when an intersecting pair is detected, and the pair forms a group. The group is used for evaluating connections between target points (*Bridged*). The game is completed once all the target points are connected by a group of branches. The conditions of joint and group are indicated with simple color-code. Once the user finishes positioning, score is updated with weighted sum of parameters. Together with the color-code, the score update guides the user to form a valid design.

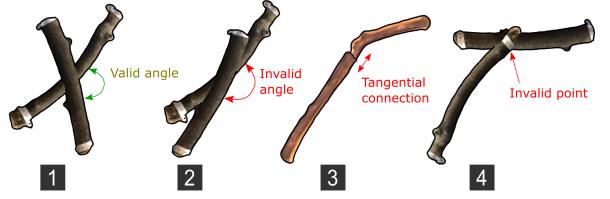
## 4.2 Joint Condition

Joint is the essential entity not only in the game but also in the fabrication process of customized lapped joineries.

Importantly, each pair of branches must have one flipped branch for fabrication constraint. We describe this further in a later section (see Section 3.2).

Figure 7 illustrates valid and invalid joint conditions.

Our joint only takes crossed pair (see Figure 7.1) because they are structurally stable, relatively simple to fabricate, and creates diverse designs. Tangential connections are counted as invalid as fabrication of tangential joinery is challenging with small branches (see Figure 7.3).



**Figure 7:** Joint conditions. 1.valid joint. 2.invalid for violating the angle. 3.invalid tangential connection. 4.invalid for connecting on a fixture point.

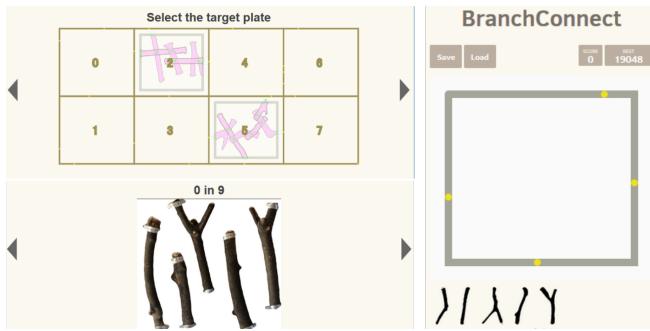
A valid joint's angle stays within a fixed range (see Figure 7.1 and 2). Joints close to metal fixtures are also counted as invalid (see Figure 7.4). Valid and invalid joints are displayed with green and red respectively.

To describe the process, we let  $\mathcal{B}$  denotes a set of all the available branches, and each branch as  $b_i \in \mathcal{B}$ . While the process checks joint condition through all the branches  $\mathcal{B}$ , each detected joint is

## 4 BranchConnect: The Game

The online game is accessible by laptops and mobile touch devices, and many users can play at the same time. The objective of the game is to collect valid layouts of branches which are fabricatable with 3 axis CNC milling machines. By analyzing the connectivity of branches and target points, the game checks feasibility of a given layout. Similar to our game, the work *guidance system during furniture design* inspected connectivity, durability, and stability [Umetani et al. 2012]. Unlike their work, our game puts emphasis on *fabricatability*, as well as *geometric connectivity*, and does not calculate structural performance of each joint. Instead, we limit valid layout space by selected joint conditions, and group conditions. We also assume that every fabricated joint works as a rigid joint, thus single connection is counted as stable to hold a pair of branches.

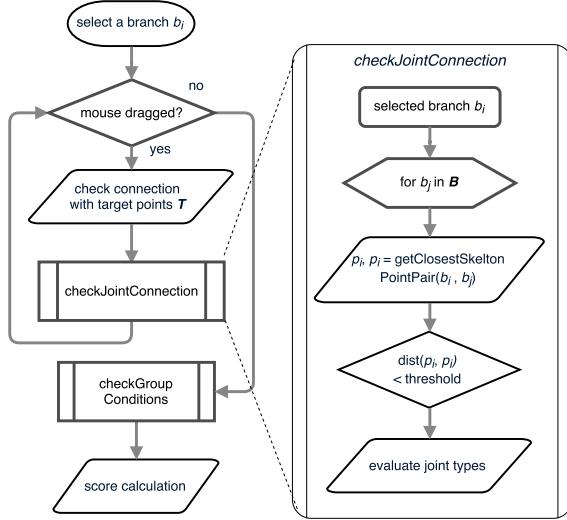
Firstly a user selects a frame indicating multiple target points to be connected, and then selects a set of branches fixed on a plate (The left in Figure 6). After selecting the target frame and the set of branches, the user is guided to the game interface, consisting of the frame with the target points, and the set of available branches (The right in Figure 6). The user picks a branch from the available set on the bottom, and then places it in an arbitrary 2D pose through basic manipulations such as move, rotate, and flip. The number of available branches differs depending on plates. With the feasible diameter of branches (over 2cm) and the plate size (50cm x 50cm), the number of available branches is most likely up to six. Within the limited number of branches, the user bridges all the target points by connecting all the used branches in one group. The game is completed when all the target points are connected. For higher score, the user can modify the design after the completion, and save it to the database.



**Figure 6:** Left: the selection interface for target frames (top) and branch panels (bottom). Right: the start interface of the game.

stored in each branch  $b_i$ , categorized in different conditions such as valid and invalid joints denoted as  $j_{\text{valid},j,i} \in \mathcal{J}_{\text{valid},i}$  and  $j_{\text{invalid},j,i} \in \mathcal{J}_{\text{invalid},i}$  respectively. When a branch  $b_i$  is connected to one of target point  $t_j \in \mathcal{T}$ , the  $t_j$  is stored in  $b_i$ .

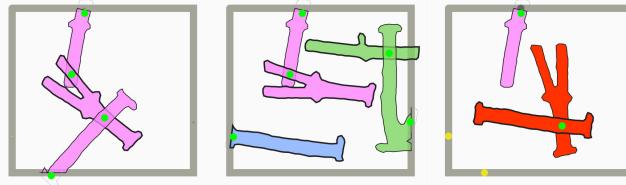
A flowchart of the game system with joint and group conditions is illustrated in Figure 8.



**Figure 8:** Left: an overview of the game system with 1. joint check and 2. group check and 3. score calculation. This process is iteratively executed while a user is exploring layout by dragging a branch. The joint check process is further illustrated in the right, and group condition check is described in Algorithm 1.

### 4.3 Group Condition

After checking joint conditions of all the pairs of branches, the system checks the number of groups as well as its connection with the target points on a frame. If a group is not connected to any target point nor other groups, the group is *Islanded* and structurally invalid. While a user is positioning a branch by dragging or rotating, groups are continuously calculated and indicated by simple color (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** Left: valid group with two target points connected. Middle: valid but three groups. Right: invalid due to the Islanded situation.

After all the joint conditions are checked, we evaluate group conditions. Through checking the all the branches  $\mathcal{B}$ , the first group  $g_0$  is created and stored as  $b_0$ . When a branch is connected to a target point, the graphics of the point changes, and the branch and its belonging group's color also changes. When a group bridges a pair of target points, a special score is added and displayed in a pop-up square, also the graphics of target point's changes. The branch connected to the target point is trimmed at the target point, and the trimmed length is subtracted from the score. The game is

completed when the number of  $\mathcal{G}$  is one, and all the target points are connected with the group. The algorithm which checks group conditions is described in 1.

#### Algorithm 1 Group Condition Update Algorithm

```

1: function UPDATEGROUPS( $\mathcal{B}$ )
2:   Reset all the groups  $\mathcal{G}$ 
3:   Create new group  $g_0$ 
4:    $b_0$  is added to  $g_0$ 
5:   if  $b_0$  has connected target point  $t_i \in \mathcal{T}$  then
6:      $g_0$  sets  $t_i$ 
7:    $g_0$  is added to  $\mathcal{G}$ 
8:   for each branch  $b_i$  in  $\mathcal{B}$  do
9:      $GroupConnection \leftarrow false$ 
10:    for each group  $g_j$  in  $\mathcal{G}$  do
11:      for each branch  $b_j$  in  $g_j$  do
12:        if  $b_{\text{paired},i} \in \mathcal{P}_j$  has  $b_j$  then
13:           $b_i$  is added to  $g_j$ 
14:           $GroupConnection \leftarrow true$ 
15:          if ( $b_i$  has  $t_i$ ) and ( $g_j$  has  $t_j$ ) then
16:            Set  $g_j$  as Bridged
17:          if  $g_j$  has no  $t_j$  then
18:            Set  $g_j$  as Islanded
19:            break
20:        if  $GroupConnection$  is false then
21:          create new group  $g_{new}$ 
22:           $b_i$  is added to  $g_{new}$ 
23:           $g_{new}$  is added to  $\mathcal{G}$ 

```

### 4.4 Score Calculation

In the score calculation processes, following entities forms the score: the numbers of valid and invalid joints on each branch, the number of groups as  $N(\mathcal{G})$ , the number of islanded groups as  $N(g_{\text{islanded}} \in \mathcal{G})$ , the number of bridged target points as  $N(t_{\text{bridged},i}) \in \mathcal{T}$ . The trimmed lengths of branches which are connected with target points are denoted as  $\text{trimmed}(t_j, b_i)$ . The score is weighted sum of these joint and group conditions, denoted in Equation (1). The weights 'w1...w5' are non-negative weight coefficients pre-adjusted in advance by authors.

$$\begin{aligned}
 Score = & w_1 \sum_{i=1}^{N(\mathcal{B})} \sum_{j=1}^{N(\mathcal{J}_{\text{valid},i})} j_{\text{valid},j,i} + w_2 \sum_{i=1}^{N(\mathcal{B})} \sum_{j=1}^{N(\mathcal{J}_{\text{invalid},i})} j_{\text{invalid},j,i} \\
 & + w_3 \sum_{i=1}^{N(\mathcal{G})} g_{\text{islanded}} + w_4 \sum_{i=1}^{N(\mathcal{T})} t_{\text{bridged}} + w_5 \sum_{i=1}^{N(\mathcal{T})} \text{trimmed}(t_j, b_i)
 \end{aligned}
 \quad (1)$$

### 5 Case Study

A design and fabrication workshop was organized to examine the feasibility of our system with a specific design target and a location. We selected a public community house where people in the community share the space and regularly use the facility. Participants of the workshop were selected among them, who were four children aged 10 and under (4, 7, 9, and 10 years old) and two parents (Figure 10). We specifically selected children with this range of age as non-experts without experiences in computational design or digital fabrication, also for observing the clarity and attractiveness of the game. The entire workshop was filmed and documented in

369 a short clip. Please refer the supplementary video material for the  
 370 documentation.

371 The goal for the participants was to contribute to an ongoing design  
 372 and fabrication process of screen wall (2m by 0.9m) consisting of  
 373 8 rectangles. Six frames were already designed and built, thus the  
 374 rest two frames were prioritized for them to design and fabricate in  
 375 this workshop.

376 Participants were informed about the goal of the workshop, and  
 377 each process was introduced by experienced tutors. The processes  
 378 were from collecting and fixing the branches on a plate, scanning  
 379 the plate, complete designs by playing the game, and assembly after  
 380 CNC milling.



**Figure 10:** An overview of the workshop. 1.the overview of the space. 2.collect branches. 3.cut in certain lengths 4.attach on a plate 5.scan the plate 6.play the game 7.CNC milling.

## 381 5.1 Setup

### 382 System and Hardware Setup

383 We used two iPad-minis with iSense depth cameras attached for  
 384 scanning branches, and a 3 axis CNC milling router with a 6 mm  
 385 diameter milling bit. We used a laptop PC (Lenovo w240 with in-  
 386 tel core i7) for running *Branch Importer* and *G-Code generator*, as  
 387 well as operating the milling machine. The scan area of iSense cam-  
 388 era is 500mm x 500mm, and the milling machine's stroke length  
 389 along z-axis is 70mm, which provide geometric constraints for  
 390 available branch sizes. *BranchConnect* was hosted at *Heroku* cloud  
 391 server <sup>2</sup>, and we used *MongoDB* <sup>3</sup> as a cloud database.

### 392 Preparation of Branches

393 The participants were asked to collect branches with 2 - 10 cm  
 394 in diameter. The lower bound of the diameter was set due to the  
 395 milling bit size, and the upper bound was set for the limited length  
 396 of z-stroke of the CNC router. The collected branches were cut  
 397 in arbitrary lengths, not longer than 500 mm due to the limit of  
 398 scanning area.

400 As our game system and fabrication process take 3D branch shapes  
 401 as 2D contours (with limited use of point cloud), these constraints  
 402 work positive for the system which automatically filter out branches  
 403 with large 3D twists. We asked participants to scan with iPad +  
 404 iSense and prepare feasible mesh model by themselves. After ob-  
 405 taining mesh models, tutors imported models from iPads to a laptop  
 406 and upload them to database by *Branch Importer*.

## 407 User Experiences with the System

408 After models are uploaded to the server, users can see that their  
 409 plates are added in the selectable branch plates with their names  
 410 and locations. Users can access to the start page by PC and mo-  
 411 bile devices. We prepare both options and let participants choose a  
 412 device.

413 A user is firstly directed to a start page and asked to submit a user  
 414 name. Secondly, the user is navigated to target frame selection  
 415 page, and asked to pick one out of eight frames. Each frame has dif-  
 416 ferent target points. The interface also shows the completed branch  
 417 organizations within each target frame. If there are multiple de-  
 418 signs, three designs with highest scores are displayed. The user  
 419 can change the currently displayed design by clicking within each  
 420 frame and choose either starting their design from scratch, or select  
 421 the design and improve it.

422 After selecting a target frame, the user goes to branch selection  
 423 page, displaying 15 plates when the workshop was held. In this  
 424 page, they see the plates made by themselves on the page, as well  
 425 as their names on the plate. The user can select the same plate for  
 426 designing other target frames. By clicking a displayed branch plate,  
 427 the user is navigated to the game interface. After completing to  
 428 bridge all the target points, the design is automatically uploaded to  
 429 the database, but the use can continue to design. Tutors and partici-  
 430 pants select layout design for the assigned two target frames, and an  
 431 experienced tutor operates *G-Code Generator* as well as the CNC  
 432 router. Participants were asked to assemble branches after joineries  
 433 were milled.

## 434 5.2 Results

435 The entire workshop took 4.6 hours to complete the whole process,  
 436 including introduction, moving, and pauses. Table 5.2 shows dura-  
 437 tions of each task.

Task	Duration (hour)	Fraction (%)
Introduction	0.3	6.5
Collecting branches	0.6	13.0
Preparing plates	0.8	17.4
Preparing models	0.3	6.5
Uploading models	0.2	4.3
Designing by the game	0.5	10.8
Inspecting models	0.2	4.3
CNC milling	0.5	10.8
Assembling	0.2	4.3
Moving, pauses	1.0	21.7
In total	4.6	100

### 439 Collecting Branches

440 The diameter and length constraints for available branches worked  
 441 as guidelines for participants rather than restricting finding and cut-  
 442 ting arbitrary branches. After cutting branches in certain lengths,  
 443 participants fixed branches on plates by thin metal plates with screw  
 444 holes. It was straightforward for them to firmly fix branches so that  
 445 they are not moved during milling process. These fixture points are  
 446 counted as invalid points in the game where joinery points can not  
 447 be generated. The participants built two plates with three and five  
 448 branches fixed on each plate.

### 449 Model Acquisition

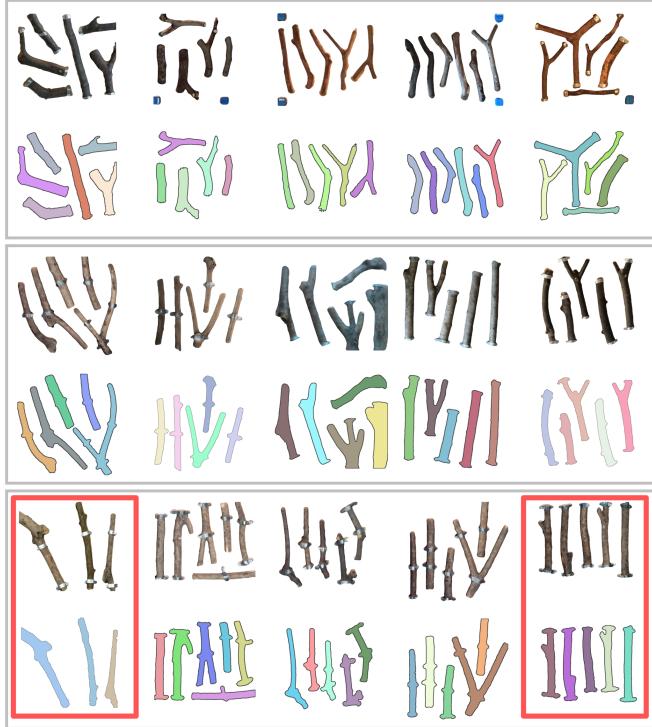
450 iSense camera comes with an intuitive software for scanning and  
 451 modifying models. After we gave an instruction, most of par-  
 452 ticipants practiced several scans and successfully scanned models

<sup>2</sup>Heroku is a platform as a service (PaaS) that enables developers to build, run, and operate applications entirely in the cloud. <https://www.heroku.com/>

<sup>3</sup>MongoDB is a free and open-source cross-platform document-oriented database program. <https://www.mongodb.com/>

453 without any problem.

454 Each scanning and re-touching took 2-3 minutes, and 30 seconds  
 455 for generating data by *Branch Importer*. Including the prepared  
 456 panels previously, we scanned 15 plates in total, 75 branches, and  
 457 35.3m of total length including sub-branches. We got 59 branches  
 458 with a single skeleton, 16 branches with multiple skeletons for  
 459 grafting. The result is shown in Figure 11.



**Figure 11:** An overview of all the 15 scanned plates for the construction of the fence. Top raw of each set shows ortho-top views of scanned mesh models, and the bottom raw is the recognized branches with randomly assigned colors. The red-lined rectangles indicate the plates built by participants in the workshop.

#### 460 Design with the Game

461 Most participants used iPads for navigating pages and playing the  
 462 game. All the participants understood the goal immediately, how-  
 463 ever, they had difficulties with mobile touch interface, such as rota-  
 464 tion and flipping operation by gestures.

465 One participant switched to play by a PC for more precise control  
 466 due to the problem. All the participants chose to develop their own  
 467 designs from the scratch, although they had instruction about the  
 468 "continue existing designs".

469 Although there is no time limit in the game system, we set 30 min-  
 470 utes for playing the game, and 8 layout designs were given by par-  
 471 ticipants. 2 frames were completed per participants and 2 partic-  
 472 ipants completed the whole eight target frames. The average score  
 473 was xxx, and average playing duration was xxx to complete each  
 474 target frame.

#### 475 Global Design Consensus

476 As the target frame selection page can display designs not only  
 477 from one user but also from all the others at once, we could get an

478 overview of design options. The layout designs were displayed as  
 479 score descending order with limited numbers (3 highest scores), we  
 480 could find feasible layout designs easily with mostly all the target  
 481 points were bridged. As participants were excited by seeing their  
 482 branches and designs, we took two invalid layout designs and one  
 483 plate which did not have enough branches for the global design.

#### 484 Fabrication

485 We did not have major problems for converting designs to G-Code  
 486 milling paths as we encountered major issues regarding the fabri-  
 487 cation before the workshop, which are reported in this section.

488 The main problem was the accuracy of acquired contours. We  
 489 observed most of scanned models had occluded regions between  
 490 plates and branches, which create interpolated faces during  
 491 solidifying process, resulting in outwardly offsetted contours.  
**TODO: check offsetted correct english** After milling was finished  
 492 and when branches were assembled, six pairs of branches were  
 493 loosely connected because the calculated contours were 2-3mm  
 494 eroded than the actual sizes. We avoided this problem by trimming  
 495 branches from 2-5 mm higher than the plate surface. After this  
 496 operation, the rest of connections were tightly connected.  
 497

498 We also observed that many milling paths were 5-10 mm off from  
 499 the center of planned joints. Multiple reasons could be considered  
 500 as reasons such as,

- 502 • deformation of mechanical parts of the CNC router
- 503 • not dense resolution of acquired contours of branches
- 504 • misaligned orientation of the plate compared to the scanned  
 505 model

506 To avoid the misalignments, we modified the *G-Code Generator*  
 507 so that an operator can freely adjust the absolute origin of the gen-  
 508 erated milling paths. The origin was usually set with around the  
 509 center of the plate. After this modification, the misalignment from  
 510 joint center was reduced with 5 mm off at the maximum misalign-  
 511 ment. Branches could absorb 3-5 mm misaligned joint positions  
 512 due to the elasticity of branches, and solidifying the structure with  
 513 residual stresses from misalignments.

#### 514 5.3 Summary of the Case Study

515 The objective of the workshop was to observe the validity of our  
 516 system for non-expert users. We could see that participants aged  
 517 10 and under were capable of following the workflow. Participants  
 518 were encouraged to contribute to the ongoing design with the online  
 519 platform, and successfully provided designs from available branch  
 520 plates.

521 We had several requests from participants regarding the game in-  
 522 terface but also related to the workshop organization. Several par-  
 523 ticipants requested to allow multiple branch plates for designing a  
 524 frame, or even remove the target frame and let them freely design  
 525 with branches. Also a participant who gave up with iPad operations  
 526 requested additional buttons for mobile touch interface to keep an  
 527 active branch selected.

528 The participant with four years old failed to complete the game,  
 529 however, insisted on accepting his design to be fabricated. Similarly  
 530 a branch plate made by another participant had only three branches,  
 531 which is not enough to fulfill bridging target points. We took them  
 532 as positive inputs to validate our participatory (architectural) design  
 533 approach.

## 534 6 Conclusion

535 In this paper, we presented a workflow to design and fabricate with  
 536 branches with their native forms, which are not large enough for  
 537 producing standardized building components. Our workflow was  
 538 validated by the case study with lower-aged participants without de-  
 539 sign and fabrication experiences. Our online platform with stored  
 540 scanned branches is accessible and multiple users can submit design  
 541 layouts and explore a global design. Our branch joint detection and  
 542 group condition update algorithms are running on the browser game  
 543 which can be accessed from laptops and mobile devices, contribut-  
 544 ing to the accessibility of the presented workflow. Together with  
 545 the accessibility, the intuitive interface was simple for non-expert  
 546 users, validated by the case study. We successfully built a network  
 547 of branches with rigid joints generated by our joinery milling path  
 548 generator. Each of joints has customized lapped-joint geometry,  
 549 which extends design possibilities of branches or woods with their  
 550 native forms.

551 Our workflow touches many developed research areas such  
 552 as skeleton extraction, structural optimization, object detec-  
 553 tion/recognition, and data-driven design-fabrication. Focusing on  
 554 the use of native forms, each step of our workflow has potential  
 555 to contribute to each area with the use of native forms of natural  
 556 materials. Also, our workflow was developed based on the  
 557 participation of users, thus the entire process is not necessarily  
 558 automated, however, some tasks could be improved to assist users.  
 559

560 The skeleton extraction could take incomplete point-set directly  
 561 from original tree branches before they are cut in length. With  
 562 data-driven approach, the system could distinguish trees and which  
 563 part of tree the branch from. With morphological analysis, the  
 564 system could suggest users where to cut branches to achieve user-  
 565 defined target design. Structural and geometrical validity/invalidity  
 566 of obtained materials could be analyzed. Our workflow requires  
 567 branches to be fixed on a plate, which takes the longest duration  
 568 in the workflow except for in-between tasks such as moving and  
 569 pausing. Using a robotic manipulator with a gripper, the attaching  
 570 process could be skipped.

571 Our game system is limited in 2D, whereas original branch forms  
 572 have rich 3D geometry with textures. In our case, these informa-  
 573 tion was used in limited ways such as in skeleton extractions and G-  
 574 Code generation. Despite of successfully fabricated non-orthogonal  
 575 joineries, we did not complete the attaching branches to the target  
 576 frames, as we prioritized to validate branch-branch joineries. Our  
 577 layout design process is fully dependent on users with limited feed-  
 578 back during design process. The game can provide suggestive feed-  
 579 back with structural analysis of each joint and entire structure.

580 Our joint and group detection algorithms are limited with materials  
 581 with skeletons, and our joinery generator is limited to branches.  
 582 Both steps use down-sampled or high-resolution point sets. It is  
 583 valuable to validate the approach by comparing with other available  
 584 methods such as collision detections or joint detection with down-  
 585 sampled model by interpolation.

586 Finally, our game-based design could be applied to different pur-  
 587 poses, not only for participatory layout design but also for collect-  
 588 ing data of user behaviors during design. Also application to other  
 589 kinds of materials could be investigated.

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