

Group Project Kōans

ShanghAI Lectures 2017

“A **Kōan** (公案) ... is a story, dialogue, question, or statement, which is used in Zen-practice to provoke the ‘great doubt’, and test a student's progress in Zen practice.”

Wikipedia

Koan 12: Investigating the basis for categorization and Symbol Grounding

Optimization setup
optimal St number 0,25 – 0,35

- Input Parameters: Amp, K_i, K_t, f;
- Output Parameters: A, St;
- Fitness: $OF = \left(\frac{St - St_{\text{target}}}{St_{\text{target}}} \right)^2$ (LSM)

Francesco Corucci, M.Eng., B.Eng. in Computer Engineering, Ph.D. Student in BioRobotics

Brain and Body evolution vs Brain evolution

Shanghai AI

Disadvantages

- Real implementation of results can be very tricky.
- Perform this kind of evolution in real environments it's a big challenge.
- High computational cost.

Advantages

- No need of a initial "optimal" structure.

Koan2 : How can actuation drive sensing

Final presentation

Kōan 1: Wearable soft robotics

- Soft robotics provides tools for making safe and comfortable wearable devices ranging from power-assist and rehabilitation to shape-changing clothing.
- *Design a wearable soft device, and fabricate a prototype of it.* Use your imagination.
- Good places to start for ideas:
 - [Soft Robotics Toolkit*](#)
 - [PneuFlex Tutorial**](#)
 - [JamSheets***](#)
- How is the soft mechanism coupled with the human body?
How is this related to the lecture topics?

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*



Marty McFly with self-adjusting jacket, Back to the Future Part II

*<http://softroboticstoolkit.com/>

**http://www.robotics.tu-berlin.de/index.php?id=pneuflex_tutorial

***<https://vimeo.com/73164578>

Kōan 2: Throwing robot with elastic energy storage

- Humans are capable of impressive throwing performance with spears, balls, etc
- We actively use a backstroke to increase the velocity of the projectile on release
- Our elastic muscle-tendon structure enables energy storage during the backstroke
- Design and build a robot arm that exploits elasticity to enable faster-than-actuator throwing movements
- Explore the role of the backstroke, and compare with human motor control literature

Optimal throwing is hard, see background below. Can you simplify with bio-inspiration?

Braun, D.J., Howard, M. and Vijayakumar, S., 2012. Exploiting variable stiffness in explosive movement tasks. *Robotics: Science and Systems VII*, p.25.



*Checkout the qbmove-based 2 DOF robot throwing:
<https://youtu.be/iPfGOKRIFJc>*

Can you do better, perhaps more human-like? A longer backstroke?

Hammer in a nail instead?

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*

Kōan 3: Orchestrated control for shape changing passive walkers

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*

- A passive dynamic walker exploits its own intrinsic dynamics to generate a “natural” and energy-efficient gait, but with several limitations:
 - It typically requires a downward slope for adding energy
 - It is typically limited to a very even and obstacle-free surface
- Could you exploit the compliance or change shape to change speed? Where?

65 km on one charge - the Cornell Ranger:



P. Bhounsule, et al., Low-bandwidth reflex-based control for lower power walking: 65 km on a single battery charge, International Journal of Robotics Research, vol. 33 no. 10, pp. 1305-1321, 2014. DOI: 10.1177/0278364914527485.

<http://ijr.sagepub.com/content/33/10/1305.refs.html>

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*

Kōan 4: A soft touch

- Explore designs of hands (and arms?) with different degrees of passive compliance.
 - E.g. rigid links connected by springs
 - Implement a physical design
 - Optionally model in e.g. VoxCad*
- What objects can be “grasped” when:
 - Hand falls on top by gravity?
 - One, two or more actuators are used? 2, 5 or more fingers?
- Discuss the impact on controller design and movement planning required



*i-HY Hand
(iRobot, Harvard
University, and
Yale University)*

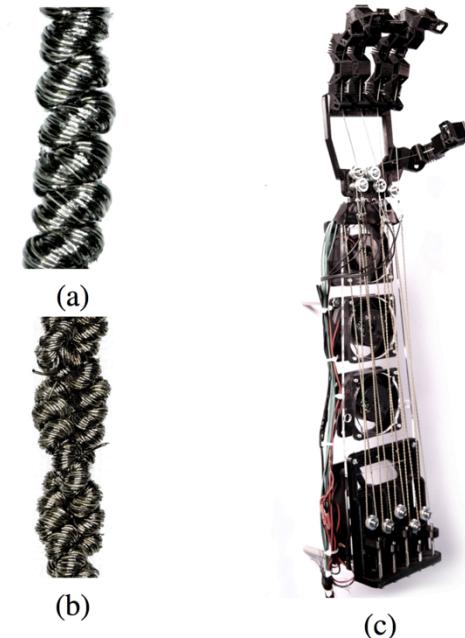
*Check out the **Soft Robotics Toolkit** for inspiration:*

<http://softroboticstoolkit.com>

*<http://www.creativemachineslab.com/voxcad.html>

Kōan 5: Variable-stiffness actuators

- Build a prototype joint with variable stiffness actuators, for example variable-stiffness agonist-antagonist type
- Explore ‘fabric-like’ weaved designs
- Could you distribute control and sensing? How?
- Test and document the properties of the designed actuator, and compare with the state-of-the-art



A good starting point:

Haines, C.S., Lima, M.D., Li, N., Spinks, G.M., Foroughi, J., Madden, J.D., Kim, S.H., Fang, S., de Andrade, M.J., Göktepe, F. and Göktepe, Ö., 2014. Artificial muscles from fishing line and sewing thread. *science*, 343(6173), pp.868-872.

Example super-coiled polymer actuators, from:

Yip, M.C. and Niemeyer, G., 2015, May. High-performance robotic muscles from conductive nylon sewing thread. In 2015 IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA) (pp. 2313-2318). IEEE.

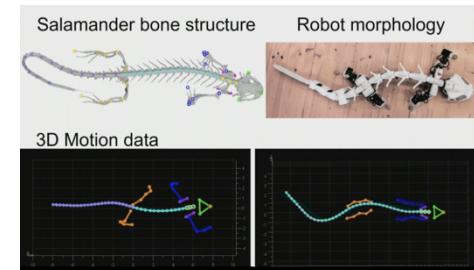
Kōan 6: A variable-stiffness and 3D-printable snake robot

- Snake robots are being proposed for tasks in hard-to-reach areas, e.g.:
 - Nuclear decommissioning
 - Underwater inspection
- Search the relevant literature to take inspiration from the skeletal and muscular structure of snakes
- What is role of stiffness variation for water and land snake locomotion?
- Build a 3D-printable snake robot (land and/or water) with variable stiffness

Perhaps start here, stiffness regulation in fish:

Long, J.H. and Nipper, K.S., 1996. The importance of body stiffness in undulatory propulsion. *American Zoologist*, 36(6), pp.678-694.

Checkout the **qbmove**-based variable stiffness snake:
<https://youtu.be/khGqOYmWv3Q>

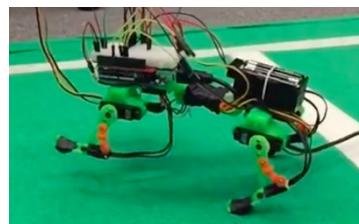


Checkout **Auke Ijspeert's TED talk** on a 'soft' salamander for inspiration:
https://www.ted.com/talks/auke_ijspeert_a_robot_that_runs_and_swims_like_a_salamander?language=en

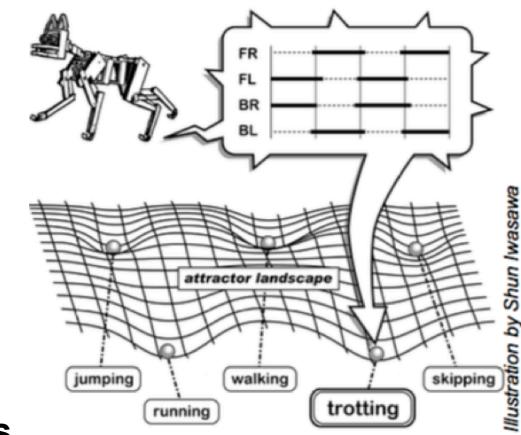
Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!

Kōan 7: Attractor States as the basis for Symbol Grounding

- Use the Puppy platform from Webots, or build your own
- Can Puppy categorize its gaits using its sensor input?
- What role do command data and proprioceptive data have?
- Why would Puppy need to change its gait? Environment and/or intrinsic motivation?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTAExarRs8w>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEV5jJJWhFE>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSr6adUvd_I



Attractor states

Pfeifer, R. and Bongard, J., 2006. *How the body shapes the way we think: a new view of intelligence*. MIT press.

demoPuppy repository (with CAD and printable files):

<https://dermitza.github.io/demoPuppy/>

Previous year's group repository:

<https://bitbucket.org/koan12/shanghai-lectures-k-an-12>

Kōan 8: Learning how to swim like a fish

- Fossil remains of extinct fish give us insights on the evolution of species
- The way these species lived and moved can only be roughly estimated by looking at the features of the fossilized fishes
- Design a robot-fish¹ and a machine learning algorithm² allowing the fish to efficiently learn how to “swim” either in simulation³ or using a robot
- Can you gain insights on the way extinct fishes swam?
 - If yes, what can you tell about the fish from the obtained results?

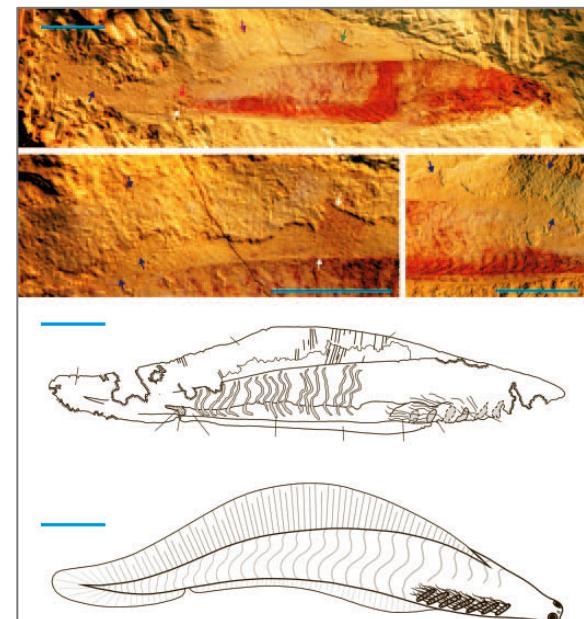
¹ Software or hardware.

² The proposed method would be applicable to different fishes and validated with non-extinct species of fish.

³ 2D simulator [here](#) or 3D simulator [here](#).

* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haikouichthys>

Haikouichthys* lived 525 million years ago

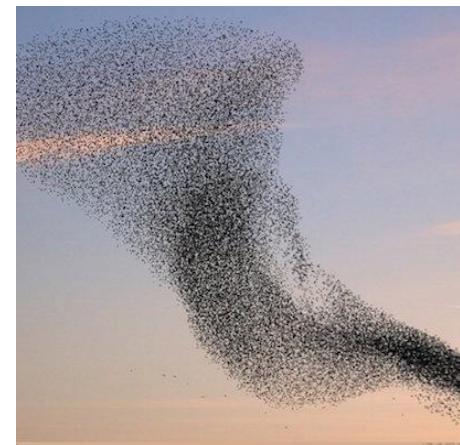


Zhang & Hou, 2004, p. 1163

Kōan 9: “Useful” robot collaboration from local rules

- Implement a swarm of simple robots of your choice in a large virtual environment
- Use biological systems as inspiration, e.g. a flock of birds or school of fish
- Under “normal” behavior individuals follow three rules
 - Move in the same direction as your neighbours
 - Remain close to your neighbours
 - Avoid collisions with your neighbours
- There are two main events that trigger a reaction:
 - [Response to a predator attack*](#) (escape)
 - Response to food (gather)
- How to model these reactions?
- How may you control a swarm? How can you let it move from point A to point B?

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*

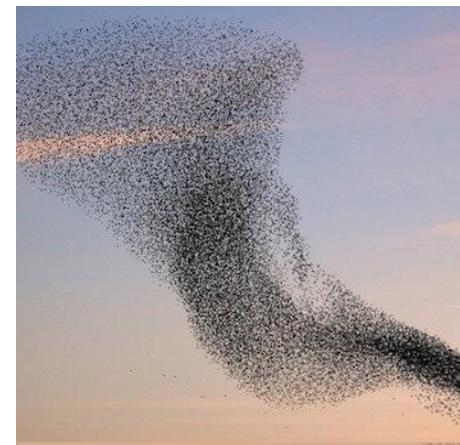


* <https://youtu.be/m9mn7EB1H6k> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SwarmBehaviour>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2234121/>

Kōan 10: Softness and Stiffness of a swarm

- Implement a swarm of simple robots of your choice in a large virtual environment
- Use biological systems as inspiration, e.g. a flock of birds or school of fish
- Under “normal” behavior individuals follow three rules
 - Move in the same direction as your neighbours
 - Remain close to your neighbours
 - Avoid collisions with your neighbours
- How to model these reactions?
- How may you control the perceived/measured stiffness of a swarm?
How could you measure it?

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*

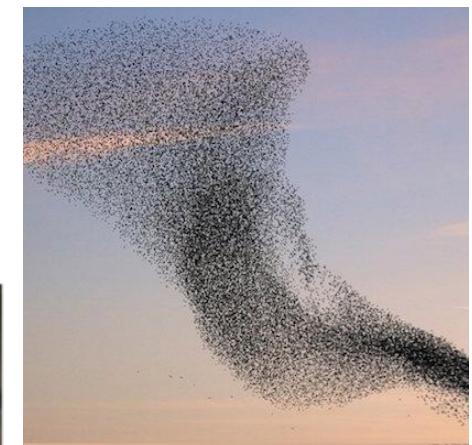
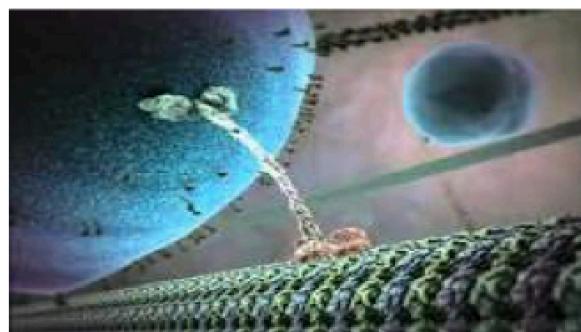


* <https://youtu.be/m9mn7EB1H6k> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SwarmBehaviour>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2234121/>

Kōan 11: Model (part) of a cell as a swarm

- Implement a swarm of simple agents of your choice in a large virtual environment mimicking a set of cellular process ideally a cell
- Use biological systems as inspiration, e.g. a flock of birds or school of fish
- Under “normal” behavior individuals follow three rules
 - Move in the same direction as your neighbours
 - Remain close to your neighbours
 - Avoid collisions with your neighbours
- How to model these reactions?
- Why would a membrane help?

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*



* <https://youtu.be/m9mn7EB1H6k> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SwarmBehaviour>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2234121/>

Kōan 12: Passive walkers on Mars

- Understand how passive wlakers walk down a slope
- Undestand how the Cornell Ranger walk
- What's the role of gravity?
- Design a passive walker for Mars surface and compare with terrestrilal ones
- What happens to human's brains on the ISS when moving???



You may start form here: <http://ruina.tam.cornell.edu>

*Do you have other ideas?
Feel free to be creative!*



From Collins et al. 2001

Kōan 13: Define your own kōan

- Have an idea for a kōan you would like to explore?
- Why not propose it, maybe other students are also interested!
- There are two main conditions:
 - The kōan must be related to the topics covered in class
 - The group must be open to all students (max 5 in group)
- Contact us first, so we can help you organize:
 - Fabio Bonsignorio: fabio.bonsignorio@gmail.com
 - 莫小娟 Mo Xiaojuan: momo152562@mail.nwpu.edu.cn

Group allocation

- Assigned according to kōan preference
 - Max 5 students per group
 - We aim to make groups as international as possible
- We encourage HW solutions (e.g. 3D printing)
 - Local core of students ok for local HW (contact us)
 - But must remain open to students from other sites
- **Thinking outside of the box required!**
 - **No single “correct” answer to any of the Kōans**

Students' TODOs

1. Read through details of the different kōans
 - This presentation will be available from website (kōans tab)
 - A living document, may be updated as we go along
2. Register for participation in the kōans by December 18 23:59 CET
 - See website or just drop an email by December 18 at the latest
 - Indicate your preferred ones (3 in order of preference)
 - You will be assigned group and tutor