### Lecture 9: Gaussian Random Vectors

#### **Random Vectors**

The idea of scalar random variables can be extended to a collection of multiple random variables called a *random vector*. Consider a continuous random vector  $\mathbf{x}:\Omega\to\mathbb{R}^2$  that maps from the sample space  $\Omega$  to the two-dimensional plane. The vector has two components  $\mathbf{x}(\omega)=[x_1(\omega),x_2(\omega)]^T$ . Each component may be thought of as an r.v.  $x_1:\Omega\to\mathbb{R}$  and  $x_2:\Omega\to\mathbb{R}$ . Moreover, each random variable has an expected value  $E[x_1]=\mu_{x_1}$  and  $E[x_2]=\mu_{x_2}$  so that the expected value of the random vector  $\mathbf{x}$  is

$$\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x} = E[\boldsymbol{x}] = \begin{pmatrix} \mu_{x_{1}} \\ \mu_{x_{2}} \end{pmatrix} . \tag{1}$$

If the r.v.s  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  have variances  $\sigma_{x_1}^2$  and  $\sigma_{x_2}^2$ , respectively, then what is the variance of x? To answer this question we must introduce some additional concepts.

**Joint, cumulative, and marginal probabilities.** Consider the event  $A = \{\omega \in \Omega : [x_1(\omega), x_2(\omega)] \in B \subseteq \mathbb{R}^2\}$ . That is, the event A is the set of samples in the sample space that map through the r.v.'s  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  to a subset of the plane B. The probability of event A is P(A) and is denoted

$$P(A) = P[(x_1, x_2) \in B] = P_{x_1, x_2}(B)$$
(2)

where  $P_{x_1,x_2}(B)$  is called the *joint probability distribution function* of the two r.v.s  $x_1$  and  $x_2$ . The function  $P_{x_1,x_2}(B)$  assigns a probability to each set B. However, for the particular choice of the rectangular set

$$B_r(x_1, x_2) = \{(s_1, s_2) \in \mathbb{R}^2 : s_1 \le x_1, s_2 \le x_2\}.$$
 (3)

$$= (-\infty, x_1] \times (-\infty, x_2] \tag{4}$$

we call

$$P_{x_1,x_2}(B_r(x_1,x_2)) = F_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2)$$
(5)

the *joint cumulative distribution function* (joint c.d.f.). If the set  $B_p(x_1, x_2) = (x_1, x_2) \in \mathbb{R}^2$  is a point in the plane then we call the probability

$$P_{x_1,x_2}(B_p(x_1,x_2)) = f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2)$$
(6)

the *joint probability density function* (joint p.d.f.). The function (6) can be thought of as a surface defined over the plane  $\mathbb{R}^2$ . The volume underneath this surface integrates to one

$$\int_{\mathbb{R}^2} f_{x_1, x_2}(x_1, x_2) = 1. \tag{7}$$

The joint c.d.f. (5) and the joint p.d.f. (6) are related by the integral

$$F_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2) = \int_{-\infty}^{x_2} \int_{-\infty}^{x_1} f_{x_1,x_2}(s_1,s_2) ds_1 ds_2.$$
 (8)

If we choose  $x_2 = \infty$ , the set  $B_r(x_1, \infty)$  encompasses all possible of  $x_2$  values and only the subset  $(-\infty, x_1]$  of possible  $x_1$  values. Evaluating (8) effectively integrates out the r.v.  $x_2$  and describes only the distribution of  $x_1$ , as in the single r.v. case. We call these *marginal c.d.f.s*:

$$F_{x_1}(x_1) = F_{x_1, x_2}(x_1, \infty) \tag{9}$$

$$= \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{x_1} f_{x_1, x_2}(s_1, s_2) ds_1 ds_2 \tag{10}$$

$$F_{x_2}(x_2) = F_{x_1, x_2}(\infty, x_2) \tag{11}$$

$$= \int_{-\infty}^{x_2} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f_{x_1, x_2}(s_1, s_2) ds_1 ds_2 . \tag{12}$$

Similarly, the *marginal p.d.f.s* are defined by integrating out one of the variables in (6) and leaving the other one free

$$f_{x_1}(x_1) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f_{x_1, x_2}(s_1, s_2) ds_2$$
 (13)

$$f_{x_2}(x_2) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f_{x_1, x_2}(s_1, s_2) ds_1.$$
 (14)

In terms of these joint and marginal p.d.f.s, one can also define the *conditional p.d.f.* 

$$f_{x_1|x_2=x_2^*}(x_1) = \frac{f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2^*)}{f_{x_2}(x_2^*)}$$
(15)

where  $x_1$  can vary and  $x_2^*$  is fixed. We can interpret the numerator  $f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2^*)$  in (15) as a slice of the joint p.d.f  $f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2)$  cut at the location  $x_2=x_2^*$ . The numerator  $f_{x_2}(x_2^*)$  is the integral of this slice (less than one). By dividing the curve  $f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2^*)$  by  $f_{x_2}(x_2^*)$  we obtain a new normalized curve that integrates to one. Hence,  $f_{x_1|x_2=x_2^*}(x_1)$  is a valid p.d.f. Recall that when describing conditional p.d.f.s we interpret the vertical line "|" as meaning "given". So  $f_{x_1|x_2=x_2^*}(x_1)$  is the p.d.f of  $x_1$  given  $x_2$  is equal to  $x_2^*$ . Similarly, holding  $x_1^*$  fixed and allowing  $x_2$  to vary gives the conditional p.d.f. of  $x_2$  given  $x_1$ 

$$f_{x_2|x_1=x_1^*}(x_2) = \frac{f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1^*, x_2)}{f_{x_1}(x_1^*)} . \tag{16}$$

The conditional expectation is the expected value of one r.v. given the value of another r.v.

$$E[x_1|x_2 = x_2^*] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} s_1 f_{x_1|x_2 = x_2^*}(s_1) ds_1$$
(17)

$$E[x_2|x_1 = x_1^*] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} s_2 f_{x_2|x_1 = x_1^*}(s_2) ds_2$$
(18)

Suppose  $g : \mathbb{R}^2 \to \mathbb{R}$  is a function that maps two scalars  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  into a real number  $g(x_1, x_2)$ . If we replace the scalars with r.v.s  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  then  $g(x_1, x_2) : \Omega \to \mathbb{R}$  can be considered a r.v. itself. The expectation of  $g(x_1, x_2)$  is

$$E[g(x_1, x_2)] = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} g(s_1, s_2) f_{x_1, x_2}(s_1, s_2) ds_1 ds_2.$$
 (19)

Now consider the particular case of  $g(x_1, x_2) = (x_1 - E[x_1])(x_2 - E[x_2])$ . The expectation of this function is termed the *covariance* 

$$Cov(x_1, x_2) = \sigma_{x_1, x_2} = E[(x_1 - E[x_1])(x_2 - E[x_2])]$$
(20)

Introducing the constants  $\mu_{x_1} = E[x_1]$  and  $\mu_{x_2} = E[x_2]$  and using (19) with (20)

$$Cov(x_{1}, x_{2}) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} [(s_{1} - \mu_{x_{1}})(s_{2} - \mu_{x_{2}})f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}$$

$$= \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (s_{1}s_{2} - s_{1}\mu_{x_{2}} - \mu_{x_{1}}s_{2} + \mu_{x_{1}}\mu_{x_{2}})f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}$$

$$= \underbrace{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} (s_{1}s_{2})f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}}_{E[x_{1}x_{2}]} - \mu_{x_{2}} \underbrace{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} s_{1}f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}}_{\mu_{x_{1}}}$$

$$- \mu_{x_{1}} \underbrace{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} s_{2}f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}}_{\mu_{x_{2}}} + \mu_{x_{1}}\mu_{x_{2}} \underbrace{\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f_{x_{1}, x_{2}}(s_{1}, s_{2})ds_{1}ds_{2}}_{=1}$$

$$(22)$$

$$= E[x_1 x_2] - \mu_{x_1} \mu_{x_2} \tag{24}$$

Note the result above can also be obtained by using the linearity of the expectation operator to distribute  $E[\cdot]$  in (20).

$$Cov(x_1, x_2)\sigma_{x_1, x_2} = E[(x_1 - E[x_1])(x_2 - E[x_2])]$$
(25)

$$= E[(x_1x_2 - x_1E[x_2] - E[x_1]x_2 + E[x_1]E[x_2])$$
(26)

$$= E[x_1x_2 - x_1\mu_{x_2} - \mu_{x_1}x_2 + \mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2}]$$
 (27)

$$= E[x_1x_2] - E[x_1]\mu_{x_2} - \mu_{x_1}E[x_2] + \mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2}$$
 (28)

$$= E[x_1x_2] - \mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2} - \mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2} + \mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2}$$
 (29)

$$= E[x_1 x_2] - \mu_{x_1} \mu_{x_2} \tag{30}$$

It can also be shown that  $Cov(x_1, x_2) = \sigma_{x_1, x_2} = Cov(x_2, x_1) = \sigma_{x_2, x_1}$ .

If knowledge of the value  $x_1$  gives no information about  $x_2$ 's value the elements are *uncorrelated* and  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}=0$ . From (24),  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}=0$  implies that  $E[x_1x_2]=\mu_{x_1}\mu_{x_2}$  which is only true if the joint p.d.f is equal to the product of the individual p.d.f.s  $f_{x_1,x_2}(x_1,x_2)=f_{x_1}(x_1)f_{x_2}(x_2)$  in the case of independent r.v.s. In general, if the two r.v.s are correlate, and if a larger  $x_1$  tends to yield a larger  $x_2$ , then  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}>0$  and the r.v.s are positively correlated. Conversely, if smaller  $x_1$  tends to yield a larger  $x_2$ , then  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}<0$  and the r.v.s are negatively correlated. The magnitude of  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}$  indicates how strongly these two random variables are correlated.

Note that the definitions presented in this section can be extended to more than two r.v.s in a straightforward manner, and we have made no assumptions thusfar on the nature of the p.d.f.s themselves. In the following section we consider arbitrary sized collections of random variables that are restricted to be Gaussian. The approach is facilitated by using vector/matrix notation.

#### **Gaussian Random Vectors**

Much like the p.d.f. of a Gaussian r.v. x is defined by its mean  $\mu$  and variance  $\sigma^2$ , the p.d.f of a Gaussian random vector x is defined by the vector mean  $\mu$  and a *covariance matrix*  $P_x$ . For, example if the random vector  $x = [x_1, x_2]^T$  then the mean is

$$\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x} = E[\boldsymbol{x}] = \begin{pmatrix} E[x_{1}] \\ E[x_{2}] \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} \mu_{x_{1}} \\ \mu_{x_{2}} \end{pmatrix} . \tag{31}$$

and the covariance matrix is

$$P_{x} = E[(x - E[x])(x - E[x])^{\mathrm{T}}]$$
(32)

$$= E \left[ \left[ \begin{array}{c} x_1 - \mu_{x_1} \\ x_2 - \mu_{x_2} \end{array} \right] \left[ \begin{array}{cc} x_1 - \mu_{x_1} & x_2 - \mu_{x_2} \end{array} \right] \right]$$
 (33)

$$= \begin{bmatrix} E[(x_1 - \mu_{x_1})^2] & E[(x_1 - \mu_{x_1})(x_2 - \mu_{x_2})] \\ E[(x_2 - \mu_{x_2})(x_1 - \mu_{x_1})] & E[(x_2 - \mu_{x_2})^2] \end{bmatrix}$$
(34)

$$= \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_{x_1}^2 & \sigma_{x_1, x_2} \\ \sigma_{x_2, x_1} & \sigma_{x_2}^2 \end{bmatrix} . \tag{35}$$

where the last line follows from our definition of variance and covariance (20). This expression is equivalently obtained in vector form:

$$P_{x} = E[(\boldsymbol{x} - E[\boldsymbol{x}])(\boldsymbol{x} - E[\boldsymbol{x}])^{T}]$$

$$= E[(\boldsymbol{x} - E[\boldsymbol{x}])(\boldsymbol{x}^{T} - E[\boldsymbol{x}^{T}])]$$

$$= E[(\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T} - \boldsymbol{x}E[\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - E[\boldsymbol{x}]\boldsymbol{x}^{T} + E[\boldsymbol{x}]E[\boldsymbol{x}^{T}]]$$

$$= E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}] - E[\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] + E[\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}]$$

$$= E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - E[\boldsymbol{x}]\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}E[\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] + \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}$$

$$= E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T} + \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}$$

$$= E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}$$

$$= E[\boldsymbol{x}\boldsymbol{x}^{T}] - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}\boldsymbol{\mu}_{x}^{T}$$

The matrix (35) includes the variances of the individual random variables  $\sigma_{x_1}^2$  and  $\sigma_{x_2}^2$  on the diagonal, and the covariances  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2} = \sigma_{x_2,x_1}$  from (20) on the off-diagonal. Given  $\mu$  and P the p.d.f of the Gaussian random vector x is

$$f_{x}(\boldsymbol{x}) = \frac{\exp\left(-\frac{1}{2}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x})^{\mathrm{T}}\boldsymbol{P}_{x}^{-1}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_{x})\right)}{(2\pi)^{n/2}\sqrt{|\boldsymbol{P}_{x}|}}$$
(36)

where the  $|\cdot|$  operator denotes the determinant and n is the dimension of the vector x. A Gaussian random vector is denoted by  $x \sim \mathcal{N}(\mu_x, P_x)$ .

## Log of a Gaussian p.d.f.

A common operation involves taking the log of (36) which can be computed as follows:

$$\log f_x(\boldsymbol{x}) = \log \left[ \frac{\exp\left(-\frac{1}{2}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)^{\mathrm{T}}\boldsymbol{P}_x^{-1}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)\right)}{(2\pi)^{n/2}\sqrt{|\boldsymbol{P}_x|}} \right]$$

$$= \log \left[ \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)^{\mathrm{T}}\boldsymbol{P}_x^{-1}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)\right) \right] - \log \left[(2\pi)^{n/2}\sqrt{|\boldsymbol{P}_x|}\right]$$

$$= \left(-\frac{1}{2}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)^{\mathrm{T}}\boldsymbol{P}_x^{-1}(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)\right) - \frac{1}{2}\log|\boldsymbol{P}_x| - \frac{n}{2}\log 2\pi$$

#### **Examples of Gaussian Random Vector Densities**

Consider the numerical examples shown in Fig. 1 in which various joint p.d.f.s are plotted (using Eq. 36). Each distribution has the same mean  $\mu = (10 \ 30)^T$ , but a varying covariance matrix

P. In addition to plotting the (continuous) probability distribution, a set of 250 samples are drawn from each distribution (indicated by black markers). Figure 1 illustrates how the four entires of the covariance matrix P determine the shape of the joint p.d.f. and the distribution of the samples. The term  $\sigma_{x_1}^2$  determines how spread out the samples are in the  $x_1$  direction. Similarly,  $\sigma_{x_1}^2$  determines how spread out the samples are in the  $x_2$  direction. The off-diagonal terms indicate in which direction the distribution is slanted. In the case,  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}=5$  the two variables are positively correlated (as one increases, so does the other). In the case  $\sigma_{x_1,x_2}=-5$  the opposite is true.

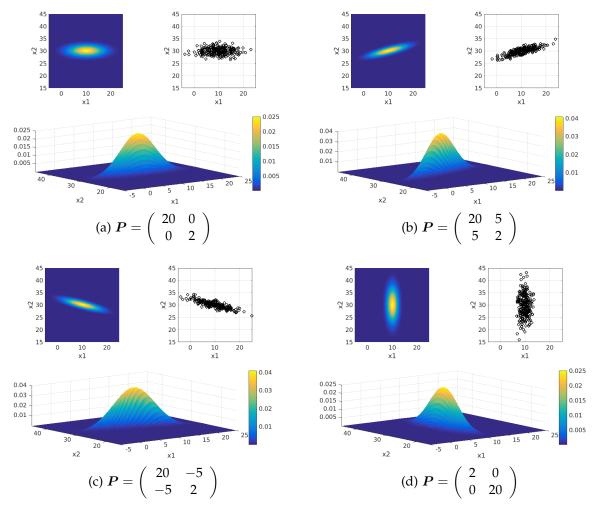


Figure 1: Probability distributions with mean  $\mu = (\mu_{x_1} \ \mu_{x_2})^T = (10 \ 30)^T$ 

# Confidence Ellipsoids and Mahalanobis Distance

Observe that the multivariate pdf (36) is a function of the vector x that only appears within the exponential term which we denote

$$\Delta = \sqrt{(\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)^{\mathrm{T}} \boldsymbol{P}_x^{-1} (\boldsymbol{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}_x)} . \tag{37}$$

This quantity is known as the *Mahalanobis distance* from  $\mu_x$  to x and quantifies how many standard deviations away x is from the mean  $\mu_x$ . If the covariance matrix is the identity matrix then  $\Delta$  reduces to Euclidean distance.

Let  $\tilde{x} = x - \mu_x$  denote the deviation from the mean. Then the equation

$$\Delta = \sqrt{\tilde{x}^{\mathrm{T}} P_{x}^{-1} \tilde{x}} = c \tag{38}$$

represents contours of the Gaussian pdf that are equal to some constant probability c. We can select c to define an ellipse with a certain *containment probability*  $p_c$  by selecting  $c = \sqrt{-2\ln(1-p_c)}$  [1, Sec. 14.1.4]. Often a 90% confidence (containment probability) is selected ( $p_c = 0.9$ ) in which case the area enclosed by the ellipse represents a 90% probability of containing the random vector.

We will now show that the geometry of this contour is an *n*-dimensional ellipsoid. First, factor the covariance matrix as

$$P_{x} = M\Lambda M^{\mathrm{T}} \tag{39}$$

where  $M = [v_1, v_2, ..., v_n]$  is the *modal matrix* of eigenvectors and  $\Lambda = \text{diag}(\lambda_1, \lambda_2, ..., \lambda_n)$  is the *spectral matrix* containing diagonal matrix of eigenvalues where  $\lambda_i v_i = P_x v_i$  for i = 1, 2, ..., n.

**Aside:** For a given matrix P we can compute the modal and spectral matrices in Matlab using [M,L] = eig(P). The eigenvalues in L are arranged from smallest to largest.

Introduce a new variable  $z = M^{T} \tilde{x}$ . Then,

$$c^2 = \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}}^{\mathrm{T}} \boldsymbol{P}_{x}^{-1} \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}} \tag{40}$$

$$= \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}}^{\mathrm{T}} (\boldsymbol{M} \boldsymbol{\Lambda} \boldsymbol{M}^{\mathrm{T}})^{-1} \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}} \tag{41}$$

$$= \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}}^{\mathrm{T}} \boldsymbol{M}^{-1} \boldsymbol{\Lambda}^{-1} (\boldsymbol{M}^{\mathrm{T}})^{-1} \tilde{\boldsymbol{x}}$$
 (42)

$$= z^{\mathrm{T}} \Lambda z \tag{43}$$

$$= \begin{bmatrix} z_1 & z_2 & \cdots & z_n \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} 1/\lambda_1 & 0 & \cdots & 0 \\ 0 & 1/\lambda_1 & \cdots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \ddots & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \cdots & 1/\lambda_n \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} z_1 \\ z_2 \\ \vdots \\ z_n \end{bmatrix}$$
(44)

$$\implies c^2 = \frac{z_1^2}{\lambda_1} + \frac{z_2^2}{\lambda_2} + \dots + \frac{z_n^2}{\lambda_n} \tag{45}$$

which is the equation of an n-dimensional ellipsoid. In the above equation we made use of the fact that the inverse of a diagonal matrix (i.e.,  $\Lambda^{-1}$ ) is simply the inverse of each diagonal element.

**Aside:** The generic equation for an ellipse center on the origin is

$$\left(\frac{x}{a}\right)^2 + \left(\frac{y}{b}\right)^2 = 1\tag{46}$$

where 2a is called the major axis and 2b is the minor axis. This expression can be generalized to n dimensions to define an n-dimensional ellipsoid.

From (45) we see that the square roots of the eigenvalues are the lengths of the ellipsoid axes. In the z coordinates the ellipse is unrotated (i.e., aligned with the  $z_1,\ldots,z_n$  axis. However, in the original x coordinates the columns of M (eigenvectors) define the directions of the principle axes of the ellipsoid. In two dimensions, we can determine the angle that the major axis makes as follows. Let  $\lambda^{\max}$  denote the largest eigenvalue and  $v^{\max} = [u_1, u_2]^T$  be the corresponding eigenvector. The angle that this eigenvector makes with the  $x_1$  axis is  $\psi = \text{atan}(u_2/u_1)$ . The parametric equation  $(x_e, y_e)$  describing a two-dimensional ellipse that is rotated by an angle  $\psi$  and translated to a point  $(\hat{x}_1, \hat{x}_2)$  with largest eigenvalue  $\lambda^{\max}$  and smallest eigenvalue  $\lambda^{\min}$  is

$$x_e(\theta) = \hat{x}_1 + c\sqrt{\lambda^{\text{max}}}\cos\psi\cos\theta - c\sqrt{\lambda^{\text{min}}}\sin\psi\sin\theta \tag{47}$$

$$y_e(\theta) = \hat{y}_1 + c\sqrt{\lambda^{\text{max}}}\sin\psi\cos\theta + c\sqrt{\lambda^{\text{min}}}\cos\psi\sin\theta \tag{48}$$

where  $\theta \in [0, 2\pi]$ .

### References

- [1] Anton J Haug. Bayesian Estimation and Tracking: a Practical Guide. John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
- [2] Bruce P Gibbs. Advanced Kalman Filtering, Least-squares and Modeling. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.