Database Techniques with Motion Capture

Abstract

Motion-capture databases are now large, varied, and widely used. This course covers techniques that are useful for organizing, processing, and navigating such databases. Topics include choice of distance function, indexing for fast retrieval, and time-series prediction for stitching, segmentation, and outlier detection. Current and potential applications are discussed.

Syllabus

- Introduction / Overview (5min)
- Database techniques: Examples in Computer Animation (25min)
- Database techniques: Methods (85min)
 - Similarity Search and Database indexing
 - * Why we need similarity search
 - * Distance functions (Euclidean, LP norms, time-warping)
 - * Fast searching (R-trees, M-trees)
 - Feature extraction and dimensionality reduction
 - * DFT
 - * Wavelets
 - * SVD/PCA
 - * FastMap
 - * ICA
 - Linear Forecasting
 - * Main idea behind linear forecasting
 - * AR methodology
 - * Multivariate regression
 - * Recursive Least Squares
 - * De-trending; periodicities
- Wrapup (20min)
 - The CMU motion capture database
 - Discussion of possible future applications

Speaker Short Bios

Christos Faloutsos is a Professor at Carnegie Mellon University. He has received the Presidential Young Investigator Award by the National Science Foundation (1989), 7 "best paper" awards, and four teaching awards. He is a member of the executive committee of SIGKDD; he has published over 150 refereed articles, one monograph, and holds four patents. His research interests include data mining, fractals, indexing methods for multimedia and text data bases, and data base performance.

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Nancy Pollard is an Associate Professor in the Robotics Institute and the Computer Science Department at Carnegie Mellon University. She received her PhD from MIT EECS in 1994. She was awarded an NSF CAREER grant in 2001 for research on 'Quantifying Humanlike Enveloping Grasps,' and the Okawa Research Grant in 2006 for her work on 'Dexterity and Natural Motion for Computer Graphics and Robotics'. Her primary research objective is to understand how to create natural motion for animated human characters and humanoid robots, with a particular focus on grasping, manipulation, and hands.

Introduction

Over the past decade, motion capture data has moved from being an expensive proposition, with motion data a rare and valuable commodity, to a point where many labs are now fortunate to have their own motion capture equipment, and databases of human motion are freely available on the web. Although there are still many open problems related to capturing human motion data reliably, rapidly, and accurately, we have also reached a point where we wish to understand how to make the best use of the data we already have available. Challenges include fast retrieval of desired motions, feature selection for measuring similarity between motions, creation of cleaner datasets, identification of outliers, and identification of fundamental characteristics of human motion that can be used to generate believable new motions or to better understand the nature of human motion itself.

The aim of this course is to present a selection of core database techniques that may be of use in computer graphics (CG). Some of these techniques are well known in the CG community, and others less so. Our goal is to review and document these techniques in such a way as to make them accessible to a broader audience in CG, as well as to present examples of their use to date and speculate on future use of these techniques.

Database Techniques: Examples in Computer Animation

Database techniques have been used in a variety of areas in computer graphics. Fast and flexible database retrieval algorithms, for example, are of interest for databases of images, video, and 3D shapes. We focus here on human motion capture databases and the use of database techniques for animation of human characters. Our aim is to present a variety of examples, not a complete survey of the field. We welcome suggestions for additions to this overview.

Motion Retrieval

We begin with the problem of fast retrieval of a desired pose or motion. Motion retrieval is an area where database techniques are of particular interest, as clever precomputation can dramatically improve retrieval times.

One subclass of retrieval problems is example-based retrieval. Here, a complete example motion is provided as a query, and the goal is to extract from the database all similar motions. This type of query can be used if a user can easily find a single example of a desired motion (e.g. a single example of a jump), and then wishes to search the database more thoroughly for a specific jump (e.g. one with more energy). This type of query has also been used to identify motion families (e.g., all jumps present in the database).

For fast example-based retrieval, Kovar and Gleicher [16] precompute locally optimal time alignments of motions for all motion in the database. However, their technique requires a great deal of preprocessing time for sizable databases. Forbes and Fiume [10] demonstrate how clustering and dimensionality reduction can improve retrieval time for techniques that rely on dynamic time warping. Chiu and his colleagues [7] employ clustering using a self-organizing map and separately index segments of the body (e.g., arms, legs, torso) to improve retrieval times for techniques based on dynamic time warping. Müller and his colleagues [24, 23, 8] demonstrate how the use of binary features to represent pose (e.g., right foot in front of the body) can produce dramatically faster motion retrieval for techniques that use dynamic time warping. Keogh et al. [15] observe that fully general dynamic time warping may not be needed in many cases, and they present a fast retrieval algorithm for motions that can be aligned well using uniform time scaling. For retrieval of motion families, Kovar and Gleicher [16] and Jenkins and Mataric [14] present an iterative approach, where query results are used as new queries to "grow" a motion family outward from a single example.

A second subclass of retrieval problems is retrieval from a small set of controls. Here, the goal is to retrieve detailed motion capture data from a sparse query that could be obtained quickly, cheaply, easily, or interactively. A number of researchers have developed algorithms for database retrieval from a small set of controls such as may be captured from a pair of cameras or inexpensive tracking devices. Hsu et al. [12] present a dynamic programming technique for assembling best motion sequences based on a reduced marker set (or other controls). Liu et al. [21, 22] preprocess the motion database into a hierarchy of local linear models for fast retrieval of a character pose from a sparse marker set. They also attempt to identify the particular subset of markers that provides the most information for accurate pose retrieval. Chai and Hodgins [6] preprocess the motion database by constructing a motion graph. They then track estimated actor state within that motion graph, and use the graph to narrow the search for poses that match the query at each point in time.

In a third subclass of problems, the user must browse through the database for the desired motion. Sakamoto et al. [29] present a visual interface for retrieving a desired motion, where the user identifies key postures within a map of poses obtained using a self-organizing map algorithm. Assa et al. [4] present a visual synopsis of motions that could aid database browsing. Ren [26] also explores representations that may help to make motions and motion classes easy to visualize in a browsing-style interface.

Dimensionality Reduction and Database Compression

Many of the motion retrieval algorithms mentioned above make use of some form of dimensionality reduction, including Principal Component Analysis (PCA) [10], local linear models [21, 6], and nonlinear dimension reduction [14].

These and related techniques have been used for other research problems in character animation. For example, PCA has been used by Safonova et al. [28] to create a reduced dimensional space within which to optimize human motion. Notably, they use this reduced dimensional space only for redundant degrees of freedom, allowing them to maintain desired contact constraints such as foot plants. Arikan [1] makes use of clustered PCA specifically for human motion database compression. Notably, they compress the feet separately for better reconstruction of foot contact. Pan et al. [25] separate motion into components using Independent Component Analysis (ICA), with the goal of identifying meaningful independent features of the motion. Shapiro et al. [30] also use ICA to separate out components of motion, with the goal of recombining them in various ways to alter motion style. Linear dynamic models have been employed by Li et al. [20] in the construction of motion textons, which allow creation of extended and variable sequences of human motion. Grochow et al. [11] use a Scaled Gaussian Process Latent Variable Model to map poses into a low dimensional space that can be used to do a form of intelligent inverse kinematics, returning poses in response to user input that are highly probable given a training dataset.

Motion Segmentation and Classification

Segmentation and classification are of interest for automatically labelling motion databases. In the area of segmentation, Fod et al. [9] divide motion into very short primitive segments by looking at zero-velocity crossings. Barbič et al. [5] explore three techniques for segmenting motions into higher level behaviors such as running, walking, and jumping. The main idea is to segment motions at points where local models of the motion created for windows before and after the segmentation point do not match each other well. Probabilistic PCA is recommended for construction of these local models.

For motion annotation, Arikan et al. [3] present an approach that makes use of Support Vector Machine classifiers to create annotations such as "carry" and "jump". Müller and his colleagues [24, 23, 8] use vectors of binary features (e.g., right foot in front of the body) to learn templates for motion classes. These motion classes can then be used to annotate new motions with the appropriate motion class.

Distance Metrics

Distance functions determine how motions are clustered, compressed, indexed for fast search, formed into motion graphs, etc. Computing the distance between motions requires understanding how motion may be timewarped, as considered briefly in the section on Motion Retrieval. However, consider just the simple question of how to measure differences between character state at two points in time.

Weighted Euclidean distance between poses is the most commonly used distance metric. Perhaps the most straightforward choice is weighted Euclidean distance with a state vector that consists of joint angles and angular velocities (e.g., [19]). Wang and Bodenheimer [31] investigated an optimal weighting for this distance metric through human-subjects experiments. A number of researchers have argued for weighted Euclidean distance on 3D Cartesian points instead of using joint angles. These points may be located at the joint positions (e.g., [2]), more densely sampled on the surface of the character (e.g., [17]) or formed into a 3D coordinate system placed at joint positions (e.g., [1]). Müller and his colleagues [24, 23, 8] compute distance based on vectors of binary features (e.g., right foot in front of the body). Li et al. [20] use a statistical two level Markov approach to learn basic motion textons, and use the transition likelihood between the textons as the distance metric for determining whether those textons may be successfully stitched together.

Arikan [1] suggests that for the application of database compression, weighted Euclidean distance metrics (and other related metrics) may not capture true perceptual distances well. Certainly, unexpected foot sliding may cause large perceptual error that is not captured well by such metrics. (See, for example [13, 1, 18] for further discussion of this topic.) The jury is still out on good distance functions for animation, and we believe that a better understanding of how we perceive natural human motion (e.g., following on the studies of Ren et al. [27], Ikemoto et al. [13] and many others) will be necessary to answer this question.

Database Techniques: Methods

The slides that follow give an overview of database techniques that may be useful in computer graphics, with a specific focus on potential applications in computer animation.

Wrapup

In the course itself, we will follow presentation of these methods with a wrapup, where we speculate on how these techniques may be of use in solving some of the outstanding issues in our field today, especially issues related to memory, speed, and smooth generation of motion.

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