Autonomous Movement

Technical Game Development II

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Introduction

- A fundamental requirement in many games is to move characters (player avatar and NPC's) around realistically/pleasantly
- For some games, e.g., FPS, realistic NPC movement is pretty much all there is (except shooting)--there is no higher level decision making
- At other extreme, e.g., chess, there is no “movement” per se---pieces just placed
- We’re going to treat everything in 2D today, since most game motion in gravity on surface (2 1/2 D)

[see Buckland, Ch. 3
Millington, Ch. 3
http://opensteer.sourceforge.net ]
Craig Reynolds

- The “giant” in this area---his influence cannot be overstated
  - 1998: Winner of Academy Award in Scientific and Engineering category
  - Currently at U.S. R&D group of Sony Computer Entertainment

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The “Steering” Model

- Choosing goals and plans, e.g.
  - “go here”
  - “do A, B, and then C”
- Calculate trajectories to satisfy goals and plans
- Produce steering force that determines where and how fast character moves
- differs for characters, e.g., fish vs. horse
- independent of steering
**Locomotion Dynamics**

```python
class Body:
    # point mass of rigid body
    mass        # scalar
    position    # vector
    velocity    # vector

    # orientation of body
    heading     # vector

    # dynamic properties of body
    maxForce    # vector
    maxSpeed    # scalar
    maxRotation # scalar (not used)

    def update(dt):
        force = ...;  # combine forces from steering behaviors
        acceleration = force / mass;  # Newton's 2nd law
        velocity += truncate(acceleration * dt, maxSpeed);
        position += velocity * dt;

        if (|velocity| > 0.00000001):
            # update heading to face along velocity vector
            heading = ...velocity...
```

**Individual Steering Behaviors**

- seek
- flee
- arrive
- pursue
- wander
- evade
- interpose
- hide
- avoid obstacles & walls
- follow path

*and combinations thereof.....*
Steering Methods

class Body
    def update (dt) {
        force = ...; // combine forces from steering behaviors
    }

    def seek (target) { ... return force; }
    def flee (target) { ... return force; }
    def arrive (target) { ... return force; }
    def pursue (body) { ... return force; }
    def evade (body) { ... return force; }
    def hide (body) { ... return force; }
    def interpose (body1, body2) { ... return force; }
    def wander () { ... return force; }
    def avoidObstacles () { ... return force; }
    ...

Seek

def seek (target) {
    // vector from here to target scaled by maxSpeed
    desired = truncate(target - position, maxSpeed);
    return desired - velocity;
}
Problem with Seek

- Overshoots target
- Amount of overshoot determined by ratio of maxSpeed to maxForce
- Intuitively, needs to decelerate as gets closer

```
def arrive (target) {
    distance = |target - position|; // to target
    if (distance == 0) return [0,0];
    // current speed required to arrive at rest at target
    // deceleration time is a "tweak" variable
    speed = distance / DECELERATION;
    // current speed cannot exceed body maxSpeed
    speed = min(speed, maxSpeed);
    // vector from here to target scaled by speed
    desired = (target - position) * speed / distance;
    // return steering force as in seek
    return desired - velocity;
}
```
### Arrive Behavior

- When body is far away from target, it behaves just like `seek`, i.e., it closes at maximum speed.
- Deceleration only comes into effect when the body gets close to the target, i.e., when ‘speed’ becomes less than ‘maxSpeed’ in:

  \[
  \text{speed} = \min(\text{speed}, \text{maxSpeed});
  \]

### Flee (Opposite of Seek)

![Diagram of Flee behavior]

```python
def flee(target):
    if ( |position - target| > PANIC ) return [0,0];
    desired = truncate(position - target, maxSpeed);
    return desired - velocity;
```

DEMO
Pursue (Seek Predicted Position)

Note:
• success of pursuit depends on how well can predict evader’s future position
• tradeoff of CPU time vs. accuracy
• special case: if evader almost dead ahead, just seek

Pursue

def pursue (body) {
    toBody = body.position - position;
    // if within 20 degrees ahead, simply seek
    if ( toBody * heading > 0
        && heading * toBody.heading < -0.95 )
        return seek(body.position);

    // calculate lookahead time based on distance and speeds
    dt = |toBody| / (maxSpeed + |body.velocity|);

    // seek predicted position
    return seek(body.position + (body.velocity * dt));
}
Evade (Opposite of Pursue)

def evade (body) {
    // no special case check for dead ahead
    // calculate lookahead time based on distance and speeds
    dt = |position - body.position| / (maxSpeed + |body.velocity|);
    // flee predicted position
    return flee(body.position + (body.velocity * dt));
}

Pursue with Offset

- Steering force to keep body at specified offset from target body
- Useful for:
  - marking an opponent in a sports simulation
  - docking with a spaceship
  - shadowing an aircraft
  - implementing battle formations
- NB: This is not “flocking”, which we will see later
Pursue with Offset

```python
def pursue(body, offset):
    # calculate lookahead time based on distance and speeds
    dt = |position - (body.position + offset)|
         / (maxSpeed + |body.velocity|);
    # arrive at predicted offset position (vs. seek)
    return arrive(body.position + offset + (body.velocity * dt));
```

Interpose

- Similar to pursue
- Return steering force to move body to midpoint of imaginary line connecting two bodies
- Useful for:
  - bodyguard taking a bullet
  - soccer player intercepting a pass
- Like pursue, main trick is to estimate lookahead time \( dt \) to predict target point
Interpose

(1) Bisect line between bodies
(2) Calculate dt to bisection point
(3) Target arrive at midpoint of predicted positions

```python
def interpose(body1, body2):
    # lookahead time to current midpoint
dt = (body1.position + body2.position) / (2 * maxSpeed);

    # extrapolate body trajectories
    position1 = body1.position + body1.velocity * dt;
    position2 = body2.position + body2.velocity * dt;

    # steer to midpoint
    return arrive(position1 + position2 / 2);
```

DEMO
Path Following

- Create steering force that moves body along a series of **waypoints** (open or looped)
- Useful for:
  - patrolling (guard duty) agents
  - predefined paths through difficult terrain
  - racing cars around a track

```
path = ...; // (circular) list of waypoints
current = path.first(); // current waypoint vector

def followPath () {
    if ( |current - position| < SEEK_DISTANCE )
        if ( path.isEmpty() )
            return arrive(current);
        else
            current = path.next();
    return seek(current);
}
```
Path Following

- Very sensitive to \textsc{seek\_distance} and ratio of \textsc{maxforce} to \textsc{maxspeed} (in underlying locomotion model)
  - tighter path following for interior corridors
  - looser for open outdoors

Wander

- Goal is to produce a steering force which gives impression of a random walk though the agent’s environment
- Naive approach:
  - calculate \textit{random steering force} each update step
  - produces unpleasant “jittery” behavior
- Reynold’s approach:
  - project a circle in front of body
  - steer towards a \textit{randomly moving target} constrained along perimeter of the circle
Wander

// initial random point on circle
wanderTarget = ...;

def wander () {
    // displace target random amount
    wanderTarget += [random(0, JITTER), random(0, JITTER)];

    // project target back onto circle
    wanderTarget.normalize();
    wanderTarget *= RADIUS;

    // move circle wander distance in front of agent
    wanderTarget += bodyToWorldCoord([DISTANCE, 0]);

    // steer towards target
    return wanderTarget - position;
}
Hide

- Attempt to position body so that an obstacle is always between itself and other body
- Useful for:
  - NPC hiding from player
    - to avoid being shot by player
    - to sneak up on player (combine hide and seek)

Hide

(a) for each obstacle, determine hiding spot
(b) if no hiding spots, invoke ‘evade’
(c) otherwise, invoke ‘arrive’ to closest hiding spot
Hide - Possible Refinements

- Only hide if you can “see” other body
  - tends to look dumb (i.e., agent has no memory)
  - can improve by adding time constant, i.e., hide if you saw other body in last $<n>$ seconds
- Only hide if you can “see” other body and other body can see you

Hide - Possible Refinements

- Instead of always choosing closest hiding spot, favor spots that are behind or to side of other body
### Hide - Possible Refinements

- Add “panic distance” (like flee behavior)

```python
def hide(body):
    if (|position - target| > PANIC) return [0,0];
    ...
```

### Obstacle Avoidance

- Treat obstacles as circular bounding volumes
- *Basic idea:* extrude “detection box” in front of body in direction of motion
Obstacle Avoidance Algorithm

1. Find closest intersection point
   (a) discard all obstacles which do not overlap with detection box
   (b) expand obstacles by half width of detection box
   (c) find intersection points of trajectory line and expanded obstacle circles
   (d) choose closest intersection point in front of body

2. Calculate steering force to avoid obstacle
Obstacle Avoidance Algorithm

2. Calculate steering force
   (a) combination of lateral and braking force
   (b) each proportional to body’s distance from obstacle (needs to react quicker if closer)

Wall Avoidance

(a) test for intersection of three “feelers” with wall
(b) calculate penetration depth of closest intersection
(c) return steering force perpendicular to wall with magnitude equal to penetration depth
Combining Steering Behaviors

- battle bot
  - path following
  - wall avoidance
  - separation (to do)

- animal simulation (e.g., sheep)
  - wander
  - obstacle avoidance (e.g., trees)
  - evade (e.g., predator)

Combining Steering Forces

class Body
  def update (dt) {
    force = ...; // combine forces from steering behaviors ...
  }

  def seek (target) { ... return force; }
  def flee (target) { ... return force; }
  def arrive (target) { ... return force; }
  def pursue (body) { ... return force; }
  def evade (body) { ... return force; }
  def hide (body) { ... return force; }
  def interpose (body1, body2) { ... return force; }
  def wander () { ... return force; }
  def avoidObstacles () { ... return force; }
  ...

Combining Steering Forces

- Two basic approaches:
  - blending
  - priorities
- Advanced combined approaches:
  - weighted truncated running sum with prioritization [Buckland]
  - prioritized dithering [Buckland]
  - pipelining [Millington]
- All involve significant *tweaking* of parameters

Blending Steering

- *All* steering methods are called, each returning a force (could be [0,0])
- Forces combined as linear weighted sum:
  \[ w_1 F_1 + w_2 F_2 + w_3 F_3 + \ldots \]
  - weights do not need to sum to 1
  - weights tuned by trial and error
- Final result will be limited (truncated) by maxForce
Blended Steering - Problems

- Expensive, since all methods called every tick
- Conflicting forces not handled well
  - tries to “compromise”, rather than giving priority
  - e.g., avoid obstacle and seek, can end up partly penetrating obstacle
- Very hard to tweak weights to work well in all situations

Prioritized Steering

- Intuition: Many of steering behaviors only return a force in appropriate conditions
- Algorithm:
  - Sort steering methods into priority order
  - Call methods one at a time until first one returns non-zero force
  - Apply that force and stop evaluation (saves CPU)
- Variation:
  - Define groups of behaviors with blending inside each group and priorities between groups
Prioritized Dithering (Reynolds)

- In addition to priority order, associate a probability with each steering method
- Use random number and probability to sometimes skip some methods in priority order (on some ticks)
- Gives lower priority methods some influence without problems of blending

Ensuring Zero Overlap

- Often, when combining behaviors in the presence of multiple bodies, the bodies will occasionally overlap one another (they’re not obstacles!)
- If bounding spheres overlap, just “teleport” to touching distance (ignore dynamics)
Smoothing - The Problem

- Conflicting behaviors can alternate, causing “judder” (jitter/shudder)
  - e.g., avoidObstacle and seek
    - avoidObstacle forces you away from obstacle until it is out of range
    - seek pushes you back into range
    - ...

Smoothing - The Solution

- Ideally to avoid problem, foresee conflict ahead of time—but can be complicated and expensive to compute
- Simple hack (per Robin Green, Sony):
  - decouple heading from velocity vector
  - average heading over “several” ticks
  - tune number of ticks for smoothing (keep small to minimize memory and CPU)
  - not perfect solution, but produces adequate results at low cost
Group Steering Behaviors - “Flocking”

- Combination of three behaviors:
  - cohesion
  - separation
  - alignment
- Each applied to neighbors

Neighbors

- Variation:
  - restrict neighborhood to field of view (e.g., 270 deg.) in front
  - may be more realistic in some applications
Separation

- Create force that steers body away from others in neighborhood

```python
def separation () {
    force = [0,0];
    for each neighbor
        direction = position - neighbor.position;
        force += normalize(direction) / |direction|;
    return force;
}
```
Alignment

- Attempt to keep body’s heading aligned with its neighbors headings

![Diagram showing alignment]

```
def alignment () {
    average = [0,0];
    for each neighbor
        average += neighbor.heading;
    average /= |neighbors|;
    return average - heading;
}
```
Cohesion

- Produce steering force that moves body towards center of mass of neighbors

```python
def cohesion():
    center = [0,0];
    for each neighbor:
        center += neighbor.position;
    center /= |neighbors|;
    seek(center);
```
Flocking

- An “emergent behavior”
  - looks complex and/or purposeful to observer
  - but actually driven by fairly simple rules
  - component entities don’t have the big picture
- Often used in films
  - bat and penguins in Batman Returns
  - orc armies in Lord of the Rings

Connecting Steering to Action Selection

- **Action Selection**
  - Choosing goals and plans, e.g.
    - “go here”
    - “do A, B, and then C”
- **Steering**
- **Locomotion**
Turning Steering Methods On & Off

class Body
    seekTarget = null;
    fleeTarget = null;
    ...
    wanderOn = false;
    ...

def think () { ... }

def update (dt) {
    think();
    if ( seekTarget != null ) force = combine(force, seek(seekTarget));
    if ( fleeTarget != null ) force = combine(force, flee(fleeTarget));
    ...
    if ( wanderOn ) force = combine(force, wander());
    ...
}

def seek (target) { ... return force; }

def flee (target) { ... return force; }
...

def wander () { ... return force; }
...