# Clearance for diversity of agents' sizes in Navigation Meshes 

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#### Abstract

There are two frequent artifacts in crowd simulation caused by navigation mesh design. The first appears when all agents attempt to traverse the navigation mesh and share the same way points through portals, thus increasing the probability of collisions with other agents or queues forming around portals. The second is caused by way points being assigned at locations where clearance is not guaranteed, which causes the agents to either walk too close to the static geometry, slide along walls or get stuck. To overcome this we use the full length of the portal and propose a novel method for dynamically calculating way points based on current trajectory, destination, and clearance, therefore guaranteeing that agents in a crowd will have different way points assigned. To achieve collision free paths we propose two novel techniques: the first provides the computation of paths with clearance for cells of any shape (even with concavities) and the second presents a new method for calculating portals with clearance, so that the dynamically assigned way points will always guarantee collision free paths relative to the static geometry. In this paper, we extend our previous work by describing a new version of the algorithm that is suitable for a larger number of navigation meshes, while further improving performance. Our results show how the combination of portals with exact clearance and dynamic way points improve local movement by reducing the number of collision between agents and the static geometry. We evaluate our algorithm with a variety of scenarios and compare our results with traditional way points to show that our technique also offers better use of the space by the agents.


Keywords: clearance, navigation meshes, dynamic way points

## 1. Introduction

Applications such as video games require characters within a crowd to follow visually convincing paths in real time. Char${ }_{4}$ acters should move towards their destination along a realistic 5 path, and at the same time maintain an appropriate amount of clearance with respect to the obstacles and avoid collisions with 7 other agents as smoothly as possible.
8 Navigation meshes (NavMeshes) are commonly used to carry out navigation of autonomous characters. NavMeshes consist of a data structure that encodes the free space of the scene by splitting it into convex polygons, known as cells. A Cell-andPortal Graph (CPG) is obtained where a node represents a cell ${ }_{3}$ of the partition and a portal is an edge of the graph that connects two adjacent cells. Then, given a start and a goal posi${ }_{5}$ tion, paths can be calculated through a variant of the classic $\mathrm{A}^{*}$ algorithm. Finally, at every step of the simulation, a local move$\rightarrow$ ment algorithm is applied in order to guide the agent through the s obtained path by computing intermediate goal positions (commonly known as way points) that connect the different nodes of the path.

When simulating a variety of characters, it is convenient to be able to calculate the shortest route for the characters based on ${ }_{23}$ their size. If we think of applications such as video games, this ${ }_{24}$ would allow a skinny character to escape from a large monster 25 by running through a narrow passage. The algorithm imple${ }_{26}$ mented must also be efficient, as for a large scenario the paths
${ }_{27}$ for all characters need to be calculated within a small fraction 28 of a second.

The method used to compute the way points is also critical ${ }_{30}$ in order to produce visually convincing routes. Most proposed ${ }_{31}$ solutions are based on computing a single point over the portal ${ }_{32}$ (usually at the center, or at the endpoints of the portal), so most ${ }_{33}$ agents share the same way point. This results in agents that ${ }_{34}$ tend to line up when approaching the portal from the same side,
${ }_{35}$ or form bottlenecks when attempting to cross the portal from ${ }_{36}$ different directions. These perceptually unpleasant artifacts ar${ }_{37}$ tificially reduce the flow rates through portals and the overall ${ }_{38}$ time for agents to reach their destination. An algorithm that can ${ }_{39}$ run in real time by assigning different way points to different ${ }_{40}$ characters can mitigate these issues.

Previous work is either bounded to a specific amount of ${ }_{42}$ clearance, only works with a specific type of navigation mesh ${ }_{43}$ (e.g. triangular meshes, medial axis), or calculates portal clear${ }_{44}$ ance on a per cell basis ignoring neighboring cells [1]. In con${ }_{45}$ trast, our method is able to deal with an arbitrary amount of ${ }_{46}$ clearance and can work with any type of NavMesh. This ap${ }_{47}$ plies even if cells are not strictly convex, or are too narrow.
${ }_{48}$ Main Contributions. This paper presents a novel system 49 to guarantee character trajectories with clearance that make the ${ }_{50}$ most of the available free space in the NavMesh. We present ${ }_{51}$ three contributions. Firstly, a novel technique to dynamically ${ }_{52}$ use the whole collision free space of portals to assign way points. ${ }_{53}$ Secondly, a novel method for calculating clearance in naviga-

54 tion meshes consisting of cells of any shape. Finally, a general

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$$ 57 ward and computationally efficient to allow the simulation of 58 large crowds.

## ${ }_{59}$ 2. Related Work

Path planning of autonomous characters in virtual environments is a central problem in the fields of robotics, videogames, and crowd simulation. The most popular solutions are based on combination of global and local movement techniques.

The target of global navigation techniques is to provide a epresentation of the free space of the scene that is usually obtained by either constructing a roadmap or a navigation mesh. The main objective of both approaches is to generate a graph that can be used by a search algorithm (usually A* [2]) to find a path free of obstacles between two points in the scene.

The roadmap approach [3][4][5][6] captures the connectivity of the free space by using a network of standardized paths (lines, curves). The main limitation of this representation is that it does not describe the geometry of the scene, nor where the obstacles are. Consequently, avoidance of dynamic obstales is usually a hard task and not always possible, as exposed in [5].

The navigation mesh approach [7][8][9][10][11][12] consists of the partition of the navigable space of the scene into convex regions, guaranteeing that a character can move between two points of the same cell following a straight line, without getting stuck in local minima. NavMeshes have become more popular than roadmaps as the representation of the free space is more intuitive, clean, and provides a better description of location of the obstacles. We therefore focus on this environmental decomposition technique.

Local movement techniques aim to provide a mechanism for the autonomous characters to move from one location to the next in a path in a smooth and natural manner, while avoiding collisions with dynamic obstacles. These methods are generally driven by setting way points within the portals of the NavMesh that work as attractors to steer the agents in the right direction [13][14][15][16][17][18]. The main problem of this approach is that characters tend to line up as they share the same attractor point over the portal. Some methods for achieving variety in characters' routes have been proposed. For example Pettre et. al. [19] presented a solution for roadmaps based on having a denser sampling of nodes, which allows for a better use of the free space at the expense of longer computational time. Other approaches using skeletons [20] allow for larger or smaller distances to the skeleton depending on crowd density. The problem with this later approach is that characters are spread as the density increases, but when densities are low they all tend to follow the same trajectories.

An improvement to traditional way points was introduced in [21] by using way portals where the whole length of the portal can be used to attract the local movement of the agents, thus resulting in more natural looking paths. However, this method

## ${ }_{52}$ 3. Clearance Value of a Cell

Given a cell $C$, we define a cell cross as the pair ( $\mathcal{P}_{1}, \mathcal{P}_{2}$ ) ${ }_{154}$ of $C$, where $\mathcal{P}_{1}$ is the entry portal and $\mathcal{P}_{2}$ is the exit portal. ${ }^{55}$ We classify the obstacle edges of the cell into edges to the left ${ }_{156}$ (stringLeft) and edges to the right (stringRight) in respect to the ${ }_{57}$ path that crosses the cell from the entry portal to the exit portal ${ }_{58}$ (see Figure 1). Note that it is not necessary to have strictly con${ }_{59}$ vex cells, as cells generated by NEOGEN [12] are allowed to 160 have certain concavities depending on the convexity relaxation ${ }_{61}$ threshold chosen when creating the mesh.

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\begin{equation*}
\operatorname{cl}\left(\mathcal{P}_{1}, \mathcal{P}_{2}\right)=\min \left(c l_{L}, c l_{R}\right) \tag{1}
\end{equation*}
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Figure 1: Clearance calculation for a given cell. ${ }_{185}$ to $\mathcal{P}_{2}$, but not from portal $\mathcal{P}_{1}$ to $\mathcal{P}_{3}$ (see Figure 2).


Figure 2: Example of different clearance depending on the crossing path through a cell.

## 186 4. Finding Portals with Enough Clearance

187 In order to avoid artifacts such as characters bouncing, slid188 ing or getting stuck on the edges of the geometry, we should 189 only assign way points that have enough clearance (i.e. that 190 they have the required distance from the static geometry for 191 the character to traverse the portal without collision). Note that


Figure 3: Examples of fixed way points that cause collisions. On the left, the way point is fixed at the center of a cell which causes a collision with the geometry. On the right the way point is assigned at a distance $r$ of the portal endpoint also causing collision.
fixing way points to the center of the cell does not always guarantee collision free traversals, as shown in Figure 3.

Let $C_{A}$ be the cell where the character is currently located, $C_{B}$ be the next cell in the path and $\mathcal{P}$ the portal that joins both cells. We want to calculate the sub-segment $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ of $\mathcal{P}$ such that all points in $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ have enough clearance.

The algorithm for finding portals with enough clearance proceeds by reducing the size of the original portals based on the following three cases:

1. Limitations given by the endpoints of the current portal.
2. Limitations given by the endpoints of the portals that must be crossed to go from the current cell to the target cell in the path (usually portals in either $C_{A}, C_{B}$ or their neigboring cells).
3. Limitation given by obstacle edges of the adjacent cells (or neighbors).

Cases 1 and 2 assume that the endpoints of portals are located over obstacles as occurs in most navigation meshes. In the case of grid based navigation meshes or when T-joints exist between portals, this would not be the case for certain portals and thus the algorithm should only consider those endpoints that are located over obstacles.

Case 1: The algorithm starts by displacing each endpoint of $\mathcal{P}$ a distance of $r$ units towards the center of the portal as we can see in Figure 4. The resulting sub-segment $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ has enough clearance only if the other edges in $C_{A}$ and $C_{B}$ are at a distance greater than or equal to $r$ from $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$. If not, this sub-segment must be further refined to guarantee collision-free traversability.


Figure 4: Example portal $\mathcal{P}$ that connects $C_{A}$ and $C_{B}$. The shrunk portal $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ is initialized by displacing the endpoints of the original portal $\mathcal{P}$ a distance $r$ towards its center.

In order to further shrink portal $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ based on cases 2 and 3, ${ }^{221}$ we need to consider portals and edges as if they were defined


Figure 5: $C_{A}$ and $C_{B}$ separated by $\mathcal{P}$ are in fact two independent polygons with their vertices oriented in counter-clockwise order, so $\mathcal{P}$ is the overlapping of $\mathcal{P}_{A B}$ and $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$.

Case 2: Let $C_{B}$ be an intermediate cell on the character's path (i.e., a cell that is neither the starting cell of the path nor the final one). In this case we have to cross the cell by crossing two portals, an entry portal $\mathcal{P}$ and an exit portal $\mathcal{P}_{B C}$ (portal that connects cell $C_{B}$ with the next cell in the path $C_{C}$ ). In such a situation, it is possible that the endpoints of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ are determined by the endpoints of any exit portals in $\mathcal{P}_{E 1}, \ldots, \mathcal{P}_{E n}$, where $\mathcal{P}_{E i}$ indicates a portal in the sequence of portals that needs to be crossed to go from $C_{B}$ to the final cell in the path $C_{G o a l}$. This occurs when one (or both) endpoint of a portal $\mathcal{P}_{E i}$ is at a distance less than or equal to the desired clearance value from the entry por$\operatorname{tal} \mathcal{P}$. To handle this situation, we check if a circumference (of radius=agent's clearance) centered on the endpoints of the first exit portal $\mathcal{P}_{B C}$ intersects with $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$. If this intersection exists, we update $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ accordingly and the process continues iteratively by checking the next exit portal. The algorithm stops when we find the first exit portal $\mathcal{P}_{E i}$ that fails the test (none of its endpoints determines the endpoints of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ ) or when $C_{\text {Goal }}$ is reached.

We take the polygons with oriented edges from Figure 5, and define $\mathcal{P}_{B A}[0]$ as the origin of the oriented portal $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$, and $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$ [1] as the end. As the portals are also given in counterclockwise order, we can state that the origin of any portal can only limit the clearance of the end of the portal for which we are calculating clearance, so $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[0]$ can only shorten $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}[1]$, and $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[1]$ can only shorten $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}[0]$. The algorithm to further shorten $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$ continues through the following two cases:

- If the circumference centered on $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[0]$ intersects $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$ at a single point, then $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}[1]$ is set to be this intersection point.
- If the circumference centered on $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[0]$ intersects $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}$ at two points, then $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}$ [1] is set to be the intersection point that is furthest from $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$ [1].

Similarly, a circumference centered on $\mathcal{P}_{B C}$ [1] is checked for intersections against $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}$ to determine if $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}[0]$ needs to

263 be updated. Figure 6 shows the result of the algorithm using 264 an example cell. Figure 7 illustrates the importance of respect265 ing the ordering of the portals when calculating portals with 266 clearance. Even though in both cases the characters can walk ${ }_{267}$ through the portals, in the first case (Figure 7 top) the way ${ }_{268}$ points assigned over the portals would continuously push the 269 characters to collide with the static geometry.


Figure 6: The endpoint $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}$ [1] of the entry portal is determined by the endpoint $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[0]$ of the exit portal, as the circumference centered on $\mathcal{P}_{B C}[0]$ intersects $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$. The other end of $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$ is not modified, as the circumference centered on $\mathcal{P}_{B C}$ [1] does not intersect $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$.


Figure 7: On the top we can see an example of what the character's trajectory would be if $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ was not shrunk respecting the direction of the portals. The trajectory leads to a collision with the static geometry. On the bottom we can see the trajectory when clearance is calculated correctly.

Case 3: The final case to consider takes into account whether ${ }_{271}$ any obstacle edge limits the clearance of the portal. This can 272 happen when an edge or portal of the current cell is at a dis${ }_{273}$ tance smaller than the clearance value of the portal that we are 274 shrinking. In the case of portals, the process must be repeated ${ }_{275}$ recursively.
${ }_{276}$ Given a cell $C_{X}$, with a set of vertices in counter-clockwise ${ }_{27}$ order $\left\{v_{0}, v_{1}, \ldots, v_{n}\right\}$, where each consecutive pair of vertices in ${ }_{278}$ the sequence defines an oriented edge of the cell, i.e: $\vec{e}_{(i, i+1)}$ is ${ }_{279}$ the edge starting in vertex $v_{i}$ and ending in vertex $v_{i+1}$, for $i=$ ${ }^{280}[0, n-1]$. We define the shrinking direction of an edge, $\vec{s}_{(i, i+1)}$, ${ }_{281}$ as the unit vector perpendicular to the edge with its direction ${ }_{282}$ pointing towards the interior of the cell (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Close up of the top left of Figure 6 with the shrinking process due to displacing edges.

Figure 9: Final result $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ after calculating the merging of the intermediate solu tions $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{A B}$ and $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$. The resulting shrunk portal before merging illustrates the application of the three cases: Case 1 can be seen in $c$, Case 2 results in $b$ and case 3 in $a$ and $d . \mathscr{P}^{\prime}$ is given in this example by the most limiting endpoints which are $a$ and $b$.


To accelerate the computation of the shrunk portal, we store the result of the transformation for a particular value of clearance in a table. The next time that the portal needs to be shrunk,
and $v^{\prime}(i+1)$ as the results of displacing vertices $v_{i}$ and $v_{i+1}$. For each displaced edge $\overrightarrow{e^{\prime}}(i, i+1)$, we calculate its intersection against $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$, and if such an intersection exists, the corresponding endpoint of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$ is updated depending on the direction of ${\overrightarrow{e^{\prime}}}_{(i, i+1)}$ as follows:

1. if the edge is an obstacle edge:
(a) If $v_{(i)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{B}$ and $v_{(i+1)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $\mathcal{C}_{A}$, then $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$ [0] is set to be the intersection point.
(b) If $v_{(i)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{A}$ and $v_{(i+1)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{B}$, then $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}[1]$ is set to be the intersection point.
2. if the edge is a portal leading to $C_{D}$ :
(a) If $v_{(i)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{B}$ and $v_{(i+1)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{A}$, then repeat the algorithm for the edges in $C_{D}$ to update $\mathcal{P}_{B A}$ [0] if necessary.
(b) If $v_{(i)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{A}$ and $v_{(i+1)}^{\prime}$ is on the side of $C_{B}$, then repeat the algorithm for the edges in $C_{D}$ to update $\mathcal{P}_{B A}^{\prime}$ [1] if necessary.
Figure 8 shows this process over the example scenario with a magnified view of the area of interest. The same process is performed for $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{A B}$ and finally, $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ is computed as the resulting sub-segment of the intersection between $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{A B}$ and $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}{ }_{B A}$. Every point in $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ is guaranteed to have enough clearance. Figure 9 shows the result of the algorithm.
${ }_{313}$ the table is checked for that particular clearance value so it does ${ }_{314}$ not need to be computed again.
${ }_{315}$ In general, Case 3 will always be the most restrictive and ${ }_{316}$ thus the key calculation, however there can be exceptions such ${ }_{317}$ as illustrated in Figure 10 where case 3 does not limit the clear${ }_{318}$ ance of the portal. Therefore all three cases are necessary, as if ${ }_{319}$ we simply use distance from endpoints we would fail to gener${ }_{320}$ ate natural paths in certain scenarios.


Figure 10: These examples show different situations where portal clearance is not defined simply by Case 3 , and thus Cases 1 and 2 are necessary.

In Figure 11 we show an example where the recursive step 322 would be necessary to compute exact clearance over the portal. ${ }_{323}$ Without recursivity the clearance on the left extreme of the por${ }_{324}$ tal would be given by the end point on the left hand side of the ${ }_{325}$ neighbouring portal, but with recursivity it is further reduced to ${ }_{326}$ the new intersection point $a$.


Figure 11: Example where the recursive step is necessary to compute clearance correctly.

## ${ }_{327}$ Critical Radius:

${ }_{328}$ All our calculations are required to perform in real time and ${ }_{329}$ we have already described an approach to speed up the sys${ }_{330}$ tem by storing information about clearance for agents of dif${ }_{33}$ ferent radii. Other agents with radius similar to those already 332 ${ }^{33}$ 334 ${ }_{335}$ The critical radius is defined as the maximum radius for which ${ }_{336}$ clearance depends exclusively on keeping a distance $\rho$ from the ${ }_{337}$ portal endpoints. It is calculated by computing the minimum ${ }^{388}$ distance to an obstacle edge with its shrinking direction point${ }_{399}$ ing towards the current portal. During run time, only agents ${ }_{340}$ of radius larger than $\rho$ need to compute the portal clearance

## 551 5. Dynamic Way Points

algorithm described in this section. Agents with radius $r$ be- ${ }^{38}$ low $\rho$ only need to keep a distance of $r$ from the portal endpoints. As the critical radius is calculated off-line, this provides a speed up of 1.15 times faster on average during the real-time calculations. This speed up has been calculated over a variety of scenarios, most of them handmade to fully test the method. However in most of the scenarios obtained with NEOGEN, portal clearance is influenced exclusively by the portal endpoints, and thus the number of portals for which the full clearance algorithm needs to be executed will be minimal.

The method used to steer the character from one cell to another is a key aspect to create natural routes in navigation meshes. When way points are assigned at a fixed position, usually the center of the portals, animation artifacts arise (Figure 12). The most common artifacts are line formation among characters that move in the same direction, and bottlenecks caused by characters crossing cells in opposite directions and being forced to pass through the same point. A typical approach in video games consists of setting the way points at a distance $r$ from the closest endpoint of the portal (where $r$ is the radius of the character). This solution provides slightly more natural paths since paths are apparently shorter and at least two way points are available for each portal, but it does not completely olve the problem. Our work focuses on dynamically calculating way points over the shrunk portal (Figure 13).


Figure 12: Typical lining up artifacts and bottlenecks when way points are set at either the center (left) or the closest endpoint of the portal (right).

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Our dynamic way point assignation is based on the position of the character within the cell. First of all, we check if the goal position of the character is visible from its current position (i.e., the segment joining the current and the goal position of the character only produces an intersection with portal edges). In that case, the attractor point is simply the goal position. If the segment does intersect with at least one obstacle edge, we need to compute a way point over the next portal in the path to steer he character towards the next cell of the path. Our target is to avoid characters having the same attractor point, so we compute the orthogonal projection point $\mathbf{q}$ of the current position of the character $\mathbf{p}$ over $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$, where $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ is the shrunk portal after applying the algorithm described in section 4 over the portal $\mathcal{P}$. If $\mathbf{q}$ lies outside the limits of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$, then the furthest endpoint of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ with respect to the current position of the character is selected as a temporal attractor, until $\mathbf{q}$ is valid

The position of the characters is given by the local move34 ment algorithm used to steer them. This algorithm will natu385 rally move characters away from each other to avoid collision. ${ }_{386}$ Each character's position approaching a portal will be different, ${ }_{387}$ so their projection over the portal will also be different making ${ }_{388}$ it virtually impossible for two different characters to share the ${ }_{389}$ same attractor point over the portal if the characters are at risk 390 of colliding.


Figure 13: The attractor point of the red character is its own goal since it is visible from its current location. The green character has its orthogonal projection, $\mathbf{q}_{2}$, over the portal as its way point, whereas the blue character has the farthest away endpoint of the portal assigned as its way point, since its current orthogonal projection lies outside the portal with clearance $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$.

We have determined empirically that in the case of $\mathbf{q}$ being ${ }_{92}$ invalid, the furthest endpoint of $\mathcal{P}^{\prime}$ is a better candidate as a ${ }_{993}$ temporal attractor than the closest one. This is because when 394 the steering attractor is the closest endpoint, the character tends 395 to move too close to the walls, producing a bad quality route.

## 696 Local Movement

 398 ing behavior with some extension to include physical forces as ${ }^{414}$ With our technique, a portal can be crossed at any point inde${ }_{415}$ pendently of the distance to their next assigned way point.416 Note that with the method described above to detect when ${ }^{417}$ agents cross portals, we improve the local movement of both ${ }_{418}$ centered and dynamic way points. Traditional center way points ${ }_{419}$ require the agents to be a certain distance from the way point 420 in order to assign the next portal. In many cases this leads to
${ }_{21}$ agents moving back and forth around portals as they attempt to 422 r

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Figure 14: Comparison between having way points at the center of portals (on the left) and dynamic way points (on the right) for the donut scenario with 25 agents (top row), large cross scenario with 50 agents (middle row) and close up of the paths crossing a portal (bottom row).

## 70 7.1. Performance

The following results have been obtained in an Intel Core 72 i7-3770 CPU @ 3.40GHz, 16GB of RAM, NVIDIA GeForce 43 680GTX . Figure 15 compares the time spent per query (mi474 croseconds) of different versions of the portal shrinking method:

- SimpleShrink(-/+): A fast and simple method, commonly used on videogames and other virtual applications, that simply displaces the endpoints of the portal $r$ units towards its center. The ( + ) version uses a lookup table to store previously computed shrunk portals, and the (-) calculates it at every simulation step.
- ExactShrink(-/+): Our exact clearance solution described in section 4. The (+) version uses a lookup table to store previously computed shrunk portals while the (-) calculates it at every simulation step.

Each test case consists of a set of queries where, for each query, we randomly chose a cell of the NavMesh, a trajectory to cross this cell (i.e. an entry portal and an exit portal) and a clearance value ( $0.5,1$ or 1.5 ).

The results of this experiment highlight the efficiency of our exact clearance method (ExactShrink(+)). The efficiency of the algorithm increases with the number of queries as the chance of producing a redundant query is higher, and eventually, every query will be redundant. Results show that for the case of 1000 random queries, the cost of ExactShrink(+) is just 1.41 times the cost of the most efficient version (in this case SimpleShrink(-)) and 1.2 times for 2000 random queries. This means that the algorithm for calculating portals with exact clearance presented in this paper $(\operatorname{ExactShrink}(+))$ is around


Figure 15: Comparison of the time taken per query (in microseconds) as the number of queries increases for the different shrinking techniques.
$20 \%$ more time consuming for 2000 queries than simpler implementations, but it also guarantees that every computed path will have enough clearance with the static geometry. As the number of queries increases, this percentage is further reduced. For the given example, we get a probability of hit of $50 \%$ for 1000 queries, which means that one in two queries does not need to be computed since it is already stored in the lookup table, and $90 \%$ probability of hit when it reaches 6000 . The time taken by the ExactShrink $(+)$ algorithm converges towards the SimpleShrink(+) method.

It is also important to emphasize that this increment in time does not have a big impact on the overall simulation since it is insignificant compared to the cost of AI, rendering or physics.

Including the recursive step when calculating clearance makes our method more robust without introducing a noticeable impact on the computational time.

The memory requirements to store the lookup table are minimal, since for each radius size we only need two 3D point coordinates for the corresponding shrunk portal. For example, in the cross scenario with 208 portals, 3 character sizes and 12Bytes per 3D point, the total memory required is less than 15 K .

As there are many elements that affect the resulting frame rate of an application, such as: rendering engine, physics library, local movement algorithm, size of the scenario, size of the crowd, and so on, we are not interested in how many characters we can simulate in real time, but in comparing our method for paths with clearance against the standard solution where characters walk towards way points fixed at the center of portals without checking for any kind of clearance against the static geometry. Figure 16 shows a comparison of the average frame rate achieved as the number of characters increases with and without our technique, when all the other elements of the simulation stay the same. This graph compares the standard solution (in red) against our technique (in blue). The results are practically the same (less than $5 \%$ smaller frame rate on average with our method), meaning that the computational time required to calculate portals with clearance and dynamic way points is insignificant within the overall simulation time. Both simulations can handle up to 500 characters in real time. Therefore we can claim that the computational cost of our technique is insignificant for the overall simulation time and that it provides results that are perceptually more convincing and make better use of the space, as shown in Figure 17 and the accompanying videos.


Figure 16: Average frame rates obtained in the large "'cross"" scenario as the number of characters increase for our method and a standard solution

## 52 7.2. Path finding

To show the results achieved by the path finding algorithm 544 with clearance, we can observe in Figure 17 the different paths 545 used by the characters depending on their size. The larger char${ }_{546}$ acters only traverse those cells with a clearance larger than their ${ }_{547}$ radius. Another nice outcome of the presented method is the ${ }_{548}$ use of space made by the characters depending on their size. ${ }_{549}$ We can observe in the image how as the characters' size de${ }_{550}$ creases, the final emerging trajectories of their color are wider, ${ }_{51}$ since their way points are assigned over larger shrunk portals.

## 552 7.3. Comparison of dynamic collisions

To demonstrate quantitatively that having dynamic way points 554 not only provides better visual results independently of the lo${ }_{555} \mathrm{cal}$ movement algorithm used, but also drastically reduces the ${ }_{556}$ number of collisions by spreading the crowd over the length ${ }_{557}$ of the portal, we have run several experiments to compare the ${ }_{58}$ average number of collisions for both fixed center way points ${ }_{559}$ and dynamic way points. We account for a collision between ${ }_{560}$ two rigid bodies at every tick of the physics engine (60x per ${ }_{561}$ second). Collisions are considered when an agent is in contact 562 with the geometry (which also accounts for agents being stuck ${ }_{563}$ next to a wall due to a badly located way point)
${ }_{564}$ As shown in Figure 18, for up to 100 agents the number of ${ }_{565}$ collisions between agents is almost zero, since at low densities 566 there are not many chances of collisions and basic avoidance ${ }_{567}$ behavior can steer agents away from collisions. However once 568 the densities start increasing we can observe how even when 569 all the agents move in the same direction, collisions start ap570 pearing. As the graph shows, the number of collisions for fixed ${ }_{571}$ center WP is much higher than for DWP, since forcing all the 572 agents to move towards the same point leads to chaotic behavior ${ }_{573}$ with loops in the agents' trajectories. This occurs for up to 175 ${ }_{574}$ agents for the donut scenario, since from this point onwards the 575 density of agents in the environment is so high that bottlenecks 576 are almost impossible to avoid.

In Figure 19 we can observe a comparison between the 578 average number of collisions per clock tick as the number of ${ }^{579}$ agents increases for fixed centered versus dynamic way points. ${ }_{580}$ Our method to dynamically assign way points achieves a much


Figure 17: Trajectories followed by characters of different size. From left to right, the larger characters (red, $r=2.0$ ) will not use the narrower portals and thus they can only walk through 97 of the 130 cells in the Navmesh, the medium characters can already get through most of the portals (yellow, $r=1.5$ ) therefore being able to walk through 110 cells, and finally the smaller size characters (green, $r=0.5$ ) can walk through all the portals having the largest shrunk portals (walkable cells=130).


Figure 18: Comparing the average number of collisions per second between agents for the donut scenario as the number of agents increases. We compare dynamic way points against fixed center way points. On the top right we show the scenario with 100 agents and on the top bottom with 175 agents
lower number of collisions between agents which not only reduces artificial bottlenecks in the environment, but also results in smoother and more natural trajectories. As in the donut scenario, once the number of agents increases beyond 125, differences in the number of collisions start emerging between DWP and fixed center WP, until the total number is higher than 225. ${ }_{587}$ At this point, the high density of agents makes collisions inevitable, independent of the method used.


Figure 19: Comparing the average number of collisions per clock tick between agents for the cross scenario as the number of agents increases. We compare dynamic way points against fixed center way points. On the top right we have the cross scenario with 125 agents, and on the bottom right the same scenario with 225 agents.

While the graphs vary depending on the size of the scenario, 590 length of portals and local navigation method, we observe that
${ }_{591}$ in all of our experiments, dynamic way points achieve better 592 results than fixed center WP.

## 593 7.4. Comparison of collisions against geometry

${ }_{594}$ The main advantage of having exact clearance calculations 595 is that we guarantee that way points will only be assigned over ${ }_{596}$ portals where collision free paths exist. To evaluate this quan${ }_{597}$ titatively, we have run several experiments using different sce${ }_{598}$ narios and compared the following methods: (1) dynamic way ${ }_{599}$ points (DWP) over portals with exact clearance, (2) DWP over ${ }_{600}$ portals with simple clearance, and (3) fixed center way points. ${ }_{601}$ For the three methods, the local movement algorithm is the 602 same, and the agents' goal cell is chosen randomly every time 603 they reach their destination. For each case we have counted the 604 number of collisions against the geometry that results from way ${ }_{605}$ points being badly assigned.

Obviously the results depend strongly on the quality of the ${ }_{607}$ portals created and the overall geometry. To show the poten${ }_{608}$ tial of our method, we have designed scenarios with several ex${ }_{609}$ amples of problematic portals (mostly ill-conditioned portals). ${ }_{610}$ Figure 20 shows the results of each of the methods in terms of ${ }^{611}$ paths followed by agents, and situations where they can easily ${ }_{612}$ get stuck trying to walk through a portal that does not guaran${ }_{613}$ tee clearance. As shown in Cases 2 and 3, agents may even 614 get completely stuck against the geometry, whereas with our ${ }_{615}$ exact clearance method, agents are always steered towards way ${ }_{616}$ points that guarantee traversability. This holds even for maps ${ }_{617}$ with many ill-conditioned cells, such as the ones created man618 ually for these experiments.
${ }_{619}$ The quantitative results in terms of number of collisions ${ }_{620}$ against the geometry for this particular scenario are shown in ${ }_{621}$ Figure 21. The three methods use the same local movement ${ }_{622}$ algorithm, therefore the only difference comes from how and ${ }_{623}$ where way points are assigned. Our method outperforms pre624 vious work with regards to reducing the number of collisions ${ }_{625}$ against the geometry. We have performed comparisons for dif${ }_{626}$ ferent crowd sizes. We have demonstrated that the differences ${ }_{627}$ become less significant as the crowd size increases. This occurs ${ }_{628}$ because there is a point where collisions are due to the high den${ }_{629}$ sity of the crowd and not just the location of way points. In all ${ }_{630}$ cases, exact clearance provides the lowest number of collisions


Figure 20: Comparing paths between the three methods. From left to right: (1) DWP over portals with exact clearance, (2) DWP over portals with simple clearance, and (3) fixed center way points. The areas where agents get stuck due to an ill-conditioned cell with a portal too close to the geometry (narrow cell) are circled.
${ }_{631}$ against the geometry. If we compare fixed center against dy${ }_{632}$ namic way points with simple clearance, fixed center performs ${ }_{633}$ better when it comes to avoiding collisions against the static ge${ }_{634}$ ometry, since in most cases the center way point will be located ${ }_{635}$ at the furthest point from the geometry.


Figure 21: Average number of collisions against the geometry for each method tested (collisions counted at each clock tick, which corresponds to 60 Hz ).

Finally, Figure 22 shows the importance of using our exact ${ }_{637}$ clearance calculation when there are ill-conditioned cells. In ${ }_{638}$ this example we can see the portal calculated with our exact ${ }_{639}$ method against the simple method often used in video games. 640 I In both cases the segments over the portals that are traversable for each method are shown with a thin blue line. The character for which this clearance has been calculated is also circled in blue. In both examples, a red agent is trying to move from cell $A$ to cell $B$. Our exact clearance algorithm provides the exact segment over the portal that can be crossed without collisions or errors. In the case of simple clearance, we can observe how the character is being steered towards a position that will lead to the wrong cell and to collisions against the geometry.

## 8. Conclusions

We have presented a general technique to compute paths free of obstacles with an arbitrary value of clearance that can be easily integrated in any existing navigation mesh system.

Our method can be divided into the following three steps. Firstly, during the construction of the NavMesh, the clearance value of each cell is computed in order to obtain paths that guarantee clearance when applying the A* algorithm. Secondly,


Figure 22: Clearance calculated with our exact algorithm (left) and with the simple clearance method (right).

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## 695 Acknowledgements

This work has been partially funded by the Spanish Ministry ${ }_{697}$ of Science and Innovation under Grant TIN2010-20590-C0169801.

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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ WWw.lsi.upc.edu/~npelechano/videos/C\&G2014_Clearance. mov

