Optical-inertial Synchronization of MoCap Suit with Single Camera Setup for Reliable Position Tracking

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Abstract: We propose a method for synchronization of an inertial motion capture suit and a single camera optical setup. Proposed synchronization is based on an iterative optimization of an energy potential in image space, minimizing the error between the camera image and a rendered virtual representation of the scene. For each frame, an input skeleton pose from the mocap suit is used to render a silhouette of a subject. Moreover, the local neighborhood around the last known position is searched by matching the silhouette to the distance transform representation of the camera image based on Chamfer matching. Using the combination of the camera tracking and the inertial motion capture suit, it is possible to retrieve the position of the joints that are hidden from the camera view. Moreover, it is possible to capture the position even if it cannot be captured by the suit sensors. Our system can be used for both real-time tracking and off-line post-processing of already captured mocap data.

1 INTRODUCTION

Considering the problem of person tracking and movement analysis, there are a lot of motion capture (mocap) solutions available in both academia and industry. Mocap is a widely used technique for storing and processing movement data of the person. A reliable motion capture and tracking is necessary in the film and games industry, virtual reality, biometrics or even healthcare. Optical-based tracking is more problematic in the tracking area if it has occlusions. Moreover, the tracking area might be very non-convex, and therefore non-coverable by optical-based mocap and tracking systems. In such a case, it is suitable to use non-optical methods for tracking; however, some other limitations appear, such as drifting, calibration and synchronization problems or additional noise in the captured data. Sometimes, these limitations are solved by a post-processing of raw data using complex probabilistic models that have to be trained on reliable training datasets, which might be impossible to obtain in a given situation.

Nowadays, there are a variety of mocap systems suitable for recording of the body movements. There are two major groups of mocap systems, optical-based and inertial-based systems. Each group has its own advantages and limitations. The advantages of inertial systems are the flexible capture area (outdoor capture, water capture), occlusion independence, fast setup time, transferability and the possibility of direct use of the raw output data for a 3D model. The biggest disadvantage is that one can get only rotation data of each skeleton joint. The joint positions in 3D space have to be calculated based on the calibration process and the root position estimation, which have to be approximated by a walking algorithm implemented in the mocap software. On the other hand, the optical systems are limited to indoor use only. They have problems with occlusions and cannot directly return the information about the joint rotation around the bone axis. The individual joint position can be tracked easily; however, the rotations need to be calculated in the next evaluation stage. In order to solve the positioning disadvantage of inertial systems, solutions using radio/NFER or ultrasound positioning have been proposed. However, these systems are in general hard to calibrate and synchronize.

Furthermore, in our project, we need to obtain reliable position tracking of the inertial suit using a commodity RGB camera. The whole system should

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be affordable and it should be compatible with both outdoor and indoor usage.

Therefore, in our project we propose a hybrid optical-inertial system. In this system, the mocap inertial suit is combined and synchronized with a single camera. Once the camera is calibrated and the relative position and orientation are calculated, it can be used for real-time effortless position estimation. The hybrid system does not require a training phase and has advantages over both optical and inertial motion capture systems. Other hybrid tracking systems need either a complicated setup or are much more expensive. Our system requires only an inertial suit and a single RGB camera.

2 RELATED WORK

Inertial Suits. There are several inertial IMU suits available on the market: a 3DSuit by Inertial Labs, an IGS Cobra suit by Synertial, an MVN suit by XSens and a Perception Neuron suit by Noitom. The suits differ in sensor configuration, price and precision. For example, the suits from XSens and Synertial have a higher number of sensors and can stream raw data for all the sensors. The Perception Neuron suit is a cheap and affordable solution for the general public, with a smaller set of sensors. Afterwards, the streamed data available to the reader are interpolated from the raw sensor data.

Optical Mocap. Optical systems can be divided into two main groups: systems based on passive retro-reflective or active markers, and marker-less mocap systems that are trained on a set of training images.

The marker-based systems are able to perform with much higher accuracy. In practice, optical systems and suits with markers are used, e.g. OptiTrack, Vicon. A group of multi-view RGB-only-based mocap systems working without a training stage exists, using shape from silhouette or sums of spatial Gaussians (Cheung et al., 2003; Stoll et al., 2011). These optical systems usually need a complicated setup and multiple cameras.

The trained probabilistic marker-less techniques (Wojek et al., 2009; Andriluka et al., 2010) that work on RGB images are not very precise in general. Thus, they are typically used for academic research testing only, or they have to be fused with inertial sensors as in (Pons-Moll et al., 2010). Lately, a helmet with two fisheye RGB cameras was proposed in (Rhodin et al., 2017) for the motion capture of a subject wearing the helmet. The system can only capture motion of the skeleton; this cannot be used for position tracking.

Probabilistic optical approaches can be trained directly on depth values obtained by an RGBD camera, for example Kinect. The Kinect is mostly used for real-time pose estimation (Shotton et al., 2013). This probabilistic skeleton estimation is not very precise, but is well suited for the fun real-time applications where Kinect tracking is mostly used. Moreover, the Kinect can be used for both real-time skeleton estimation and surface reconstruction using Kinect Fusion (Izadi et al., 2011). Depth values from the RGBD camera can be used for point cloud reconstruction and the skeleton can be extracted from a point cloud. However, this process is too slow for real-time motion capture. Nevertheless, it can be used for body size estimation and calibration from a single scan. These data can be used to improve motion capture data (Anguelov et al., 2005).

Moreover, the probabilistic optical-based systems are trained on RGB or RGBD images and estimate position in 3D space based on probabilistic models (Shotton et al., 2013; Andriluka et al., 2010). An optical flow based on Chamfer matching can be used to track the subject without a training stage (Dimitrijevic et al., 2006; Katz and Aghajan, 2008). These methods can be used directly on the input frames; however, a background subtraction is a necessary preprocessing step to obtain robust tracking results.

An extensive comparison of inertial and optical-based motion capture suits can be found in (Skogstad et al., 2011).

Person Tracking. Similarly, as in the case of mocap solutions, the tracking can be optical based or approximated using triangulation of distances to the signal source, e.g. GPS. The lighthouse tracking by Valve is part of HTC Vive and it is based on a measuring of time delay between emitting a flash and sweeping a beam of light across the room. The receivers calculate the time delay between these two light flashes and using a simple trigonometry the 3D position of the receiver can be evaluated in real-time.

Hybrid Systems. Several hybrid approaches were published in recent years. The hybrid systems for skeleton and position tracking are based on a fusion of the IMU orientation data and some other sensor. In (Ziegler et al., 2011), the subject in an inertial suit is tracked by a robot with a laser scanner. Such a combination can track the subject's position and trajectory in big areas; however, it might be impossible to use the robot in small interiors and the robot is too expensive tool for common usage. A fusion of multi-view RGB cameras with few IMUs was proposed in (Pons-Moll et al., 2010; von Marcard et al., 2016). These approaches for fusion give very good results; however, the fusion needs a scanned template model of the subject and the system needs multiple RGB cameras in order to correctly fit the template into the silhouette. A combination of discriminative and generative tracking using a depth sensor was used in (Helten et al., 2013). The approach also needs a template mesh model and the RGBD camera has a very limited volume where the fusion works precisely enough. In general, the mentioned related hybrid approaches either need a much more complicated and expensive setup (multiple cameras, depth camera, robot), or they have a much more complex tracking pipeline than our approach (template mesh scanning, non-linear energy minimization, training stage).

3 OPTICAL-INERTIAL SYNCHRONIZATION

The main idea behind the optical-inertial tracking solution of the suit and the camera is determining the 3D position of the actor from his silhouette in the camera image based on his actual pose. Knowing the actor's skeleton pose from the suit in real-time, we are able to predict the body shape we are looking for within the camera image. First, a base mesh is constructed using the actor's specific parameters such as height or local diameters. This mesh is then used for rendering a shape which is similar to the actor's silhouette in the image. A virtual camera which is used for the base mesh rendering needs to see the scene the same way as a real camera sees the scene with actor; therefore, it needs to be calibrated.

The rendered base mesh silhouette is then used to search the local neighborhood of the last known position of the subject in the next image frame. Minimizing the energy composed of spatial integration of Chamfer matching error in the image space, we are able to perform real-time tracking of the subject. During the tracking, a 3D virtual scene is rendered and matched to the camera image; therefore, if it is matched with the precisely calibrated camera setup, we are able to directly estimate the 3D position of the subject in the real world.

3.1 System Overview

The whole tracking system is composed of three phases: a calibration phase, a tracking start-up phase and an iterative tracking phase. The first two phases are used for the initial setup only to determine and to correctly represent the real world in the tracking system; therefore, the third phase is the actual tracking stage.

The calibration phase needs to be done only once, or when the camera is replaced. This step is required to acquire correct camera parameters. The parameters can be saved and reused before each tracking session.

The second stage, the tracking start-up phase, needs to be performed at least once before each session, to synchronize the real-world camera with the virtual camera of a system, and to specify the actor's starting location for the tracking. However, there is a possibility to assign these properties during the iterative tracking phase, seamlessly without the interruption of the tracking procedure.

Finally, the tracking phase is iteratively performed during the whole remaining tracking time. Output of this stage is the true 3D position of the actor in both, the virtual scene and the real world.

3.2 Initial Setup and Calibration

For the camera calibration, an OpenCV with its built-in modules is used. We used the ChArUco module that uses a hybrid checkerboard for both camera calibration and camera position estimation, as can be seen in Figure 1. Given several pairs of point correspondences of calibration patterns in the real world and in the image space, it is possible to find intrinsic and extrinsic parameters of the camera.

Figure 1: The ChArUco calibration board. The ChArUco is a combination of the classical calibration checkerboard and the ChArUco alphabet signs.

Next, the body size of the actor needs be measured manually using a ruler, or in an automatic way using a Kinect or calibrated RGB camera. The measured body height and body radii are then used together with the mocap position to construct a base mesh approximating the body of the subject.

3.3 Virtual Scene Creation

The main idea behind the synchronization is to create a virtual scene according to the parameters acquired in the real world. This step is called the tracking start-up phase, and it must be generally executed before each tracking session, when some scene properties are changed, e.g. camera is moved, camera is changed, starting position is changed, etc.

Figure 2: A model-view matrix that consists of a rotation and a translation of the ChArUco board into the camera image is obtained in the tracking start-up phase. Thus, the origin of the virtual scene is set into the ChArUco board location and the camera position and orientation are set accordingly.

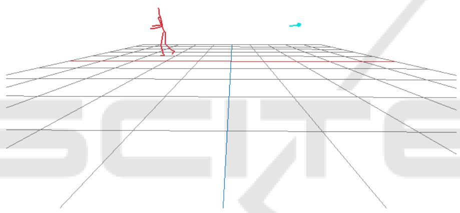

Figure 3: A virtual scene is constructed based on the camera calibration, calculated scene parameters and current mocap data. Using either the real-time mocap data or stored offline mocap data, a silhouette of the tracked subject is approximated and later used during the tracking phase.

In order to get the origin of the virtual space, a ChArUco board marker (see Figure 2) is placed in front of the camera. As an input it takes corresponding points together with board parameters and as an output it produces the rotation and translation transformations that give us a model-view matrix of the checkerboard in world space coordinates. Having the ChArUco marker detected, we are able to estimate the camera position and orientation relative to the origin. The second purpose of placing a ChArUco board into the scene is to define the starting position of the actor (the actor starts in the origin of the virtual scene). This is the position where the tracking starts. The precision of the tracked position relies deeply on the camera calibration and proper virtual scene setup (see Figure 3). If the ChArUco board cannot be used for some reason, the starting position and camera parameters can be always set manually.

3.4 Silhouette Image Database Construction

The camera image contains objects and subjects which are not important for the system. The goal of the system is to locate and track only the actor dressed in the motion capture suit. Therefore, the pose data from the suit are used to determine this. The reader of the suit rotations is able to stream local transformations for each frame in real-time.

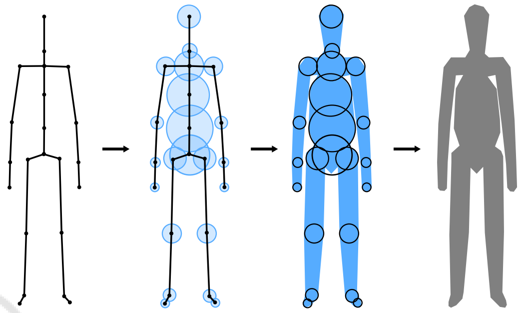

Figure 4: A base mesh is created using the skeleton acquired from the mocap suit. The skeleton is enhanced with measured radii of the actor's body. Note that the base mesh construction process is depicted in 2D only.

Firstly, a shape that roughly represents the actor's body is needed. Here, it might be possible to use a broad set of shapes, from primitives roughly approximating the body to a high-detailed 3D scan. However, we choose to create a simple base mesh approximating the body shape mesh from the input skeleton, because it is easily customizable, scalable and can be generated in real-time for any skeleton pose. For this a SQM algorithm (Bærentzen et al., 2012) is used, which is able to generate such a mesh specifying only the skeleton and the radius of a sphere around each skeleton node (see Figure 4). These radii as well as skeleton height are dependant on the actor's body type and need to be measured or approximated manually. Such a specific base mesh is generated only once, and a pose for every frame is created by applying rotations from suit sensors and transforming the base mesh accordingly using a skinning algorithm.
With the virtual camera and scene created and successfully calibrated, it is possible to render an image of the base mesh as if it was seen by a real camera. Afterwards, this image is processed to obtain only the silhouette of a rendered image. Finally, a set of silhouette images is rendered, applying several shifts of a base mesh in eight evenly distributed directional vectors. Our set consists of images shifted k times by d in a space around a specified pose as well as one image of a base mesh exactly in the current position, as

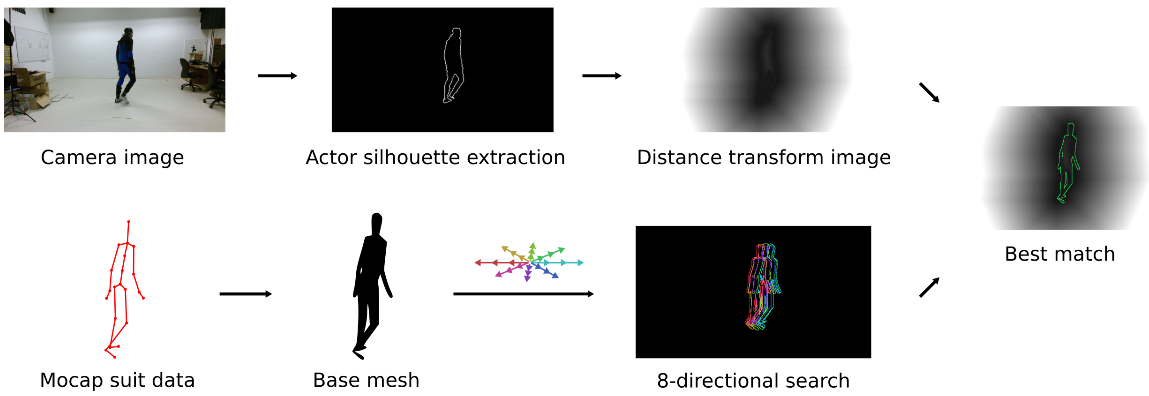

Figure 5: The pipeline of our optical-inertial synchronization. (Top) the camera image is thresholded and transformed into a distance transform image. (Bottom) a base mesh is constructed based on the acquired skeleton and it is rendered in different positions. The base of 8 search vectors is used to render 8 shifted silhouettes. The Chamfer matching of the rendered base mesh and the distance transform image is performed, and the error is evaluated. Finally, the error minimization is used to find the next position in 3D space.

can be seen in Figure 5. In our experiments, we used constants $d = 10cm$ and $k = 3$; therefore, in total a set of 25 images is rendered and stored in the silhouette database.

3.5 Tracking

The tracking phase begins after the tracking start-up phase was executed successfully, which properly sets up a camera for rendering the base mesh silhouette database. An actor is located in a specified position defined by the ChArUco board placed in the scene. At this point, the tracking phase is ready to start. This start-up position is considered to be the actor's true position in the first frame. For each next frame, a motion vector is evaluated to evaluate the actor's next position.

Figure 6: Tracking of the actor position using Chamfer matching. (Top) an input image and the subtracted background image in grayscale. (Bottom) applied adaptive thresholding and calculated distance transform of the silhouette.

First, the captured camera image is pre-processed using background subtraction, thresholded and Canny edge detection is performed so that only the actor's silhouette is obtained. Then, the image is transformed into a distance transform image (see Figure 6). Afterwards, the already pre-rendered database of base mesh silhouette images is used to evaluate the energy e for the optimization. The error potential e is calculated for each silhouette as an integration of the distance transform function $DT(x)$ over the actor silhouette S as

$$e_k = \iint_S DT(\mathbf{x}(s,t))dsdt, \quad (1)$$

where parameters s and t are the parameters of the one-dimensional silhouette curve and a kernel function that is applied over the curve to make the silhouette wider, respectively. The term $\mathbf{x}(s,t)$ is a function that maps parameters s and t to the image space, where function $DT(x)$ is evaluated. The integration in discrete form is performed in the image space as a sum of non zero pixels from silhouette image S_k and normalized afterwards as

$$e_k = \frac{\sum_{i=0}^{m} \sum_{j=0}^{n} DT(i,j) \cdot S_k(i,j)}{count\_non\_zero(S_k)}, \quad (2)$$

where (i,j) refers to a pixel position of the image with dimensions $m \times n$, DT is the distance transform image, S_k is the binary silhouette mask image and the function $count\_non\_zero()$ returns a number of non zero pixels contained in the image. Minimizing the error energy, we are able to evaluate the direction and the magnitude of the subject's movement based on the shift vectors used for the construction of a database image. Adding such a vector to the position of an actor in the last frame, we are able to evaluate the actor

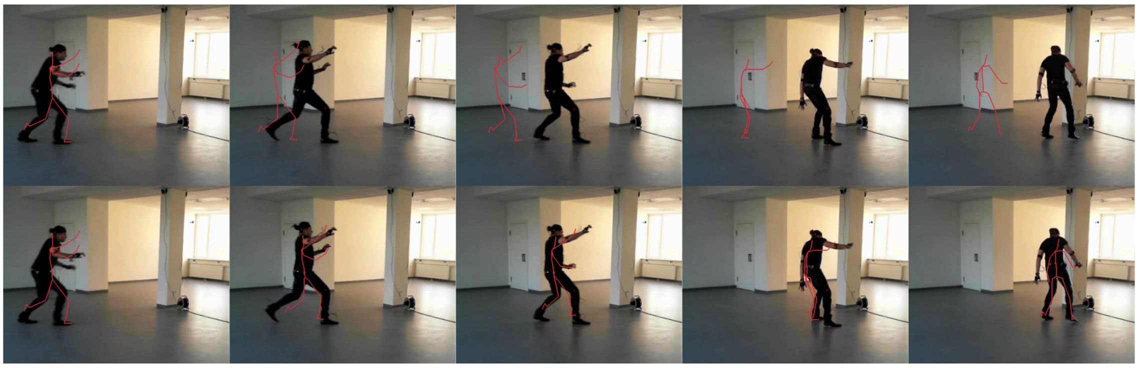

Figure 7: Comparison of XSens MVN tracking (top) and our optical-inertial evaluation (bottom). In the second frame, the sliding starts and the mocap system fails to evaluate the position correctly. Images were captured using a Microsoft LifeCam HD 3000 RGB webcam.

position in the current frame. In the end of the tracking phase, we have a raw corrected 3D position of the actor. The pipeline of the system until this point can be seen in Figure 5. To enhance the raw data, some suitable post-processing method might be used.

3.6 Post-processing via Gaussian Filtering

The change of estimated position of the subject in time might not be continuous. Thus, it is useful to post-process the discontinuities into a continuous movement. In our experiments we have tried two methods of post-processing: a Gaussian-based smoothing and Kalman filtering. We used local Gaussian smoothing in the neighborhood of 20 time steps and the Extended Kalman Filter (EKT) (Julier and Uhlmann, 2004) implemented in OpenCV. Using the EKT filtering, the resulting graphs seem visually smoother, but the overall error was higher. Therefore, in the final results, the Gaussian smoothing was used (see Figure 9).

4 RESULTS

We demonstrate the results of our approach on capturing the motion and estimating the position of a subject in a space. The subject wears an XSens suit and the scene is captured using a Microsoft LifeCam HD 3000 RGB webcam and iDS 3 uEye monochromatic camera with a fisheye lens.

4.1 Correction of Mocap Suit Data

First, the position in 3D space is approximated using the standard walking algorithm usually implemented

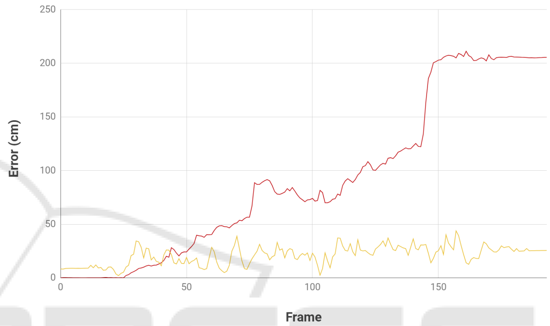

Figure 8: Comparison of error difference in Euclidean distance between the methods and ground truth obtained using HTC Vive: (Red) original position from inertial suit software and (yellow) our optical-inertial method. Graph is evaluated on a dataset, where the movement was the most problematic for the original method (e.g. jumping, sliding).

within the mocap software. In this scenario, the actor starts to run and finishes the running sequence by sliding on the ground. The sliding is the stage, where the inertial mocap suit fails. We use the position estimated by XSens MVN Studio and export it into a bvh file. Second, the position is evaluated using our optical-inertial system. Both estimated positions, from the original method and our camera-based correction, can be seen in Figure 7.

4.2 Evaluation of Estimated Position

In order to evaluate our method by comparing results to the ground truth, we evaluate our correction of position inside a known environment for movement in predefined patterns (see Figure 11). During this evaluation, the subject moves along the defined trajectories with known dimensions. During the evaluation we track three position estimations in time. The subject is tracked by HTC Vive lighthouses (ground truth), and position estimation is done by

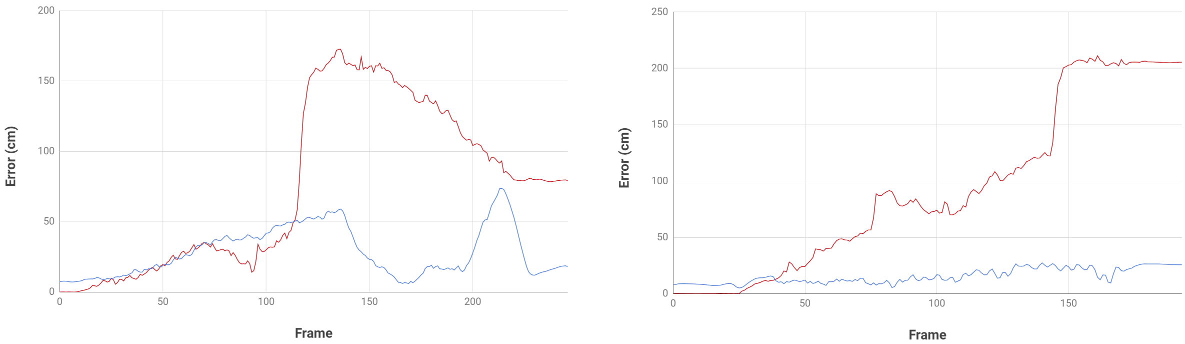

Figure 9: Comparison of error difference with filtered data: (Red) position calculated by original inertial suit software and (blue) post-processed versions of estimated positions using our approach. Another example from the datasets is plotted on the right. In both cases, the smoothed versions of evaluated positions approximate the movement and the real position of the subject much better.

MVN XSens Studio and our optical-inertial estimation. Comparison of the error difference in Euclidean distance of the original position from the MVN XSens Studio and our approach can be seen in Figure 8. Furthermore, we tried to smooth the raw results from our approach; the graphs with the smoothed positions of two different datasets are shown in Figure 9. In Figure 10, the setup used for the evaluation is depicted and described.

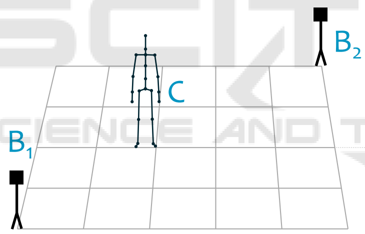

Figure 10: The evaluation setup. The subject wearing a mocap suit (C) is captured by a camera (A) and tracked by HTC Vive lighthouses (B). The position estimated by the lighthouses is used as a ground truth when the original mocap suit tracking is compared to the proposed method.

5 LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of the proposed solution is the dependency on the static background subtraction; thus we are not able to guarantee robust tracking in scenes with a dynamically changing background. In the case of background changes, there are edges in the image space not related to the actor that may drive the tracking into a local minimum. Another limitation of the system is the predefined set of search directions that produces discretizetion errors. If required, the search space could be sampled more densely at the cost of higher computation time. The rendered base mesh is only a rough approximation of the human body; a highly detailed full-body scan could be used for better approximation of the silhouette. However, the base mesh is easy to compute, affordable to acquire and the results are good enough for our applications.

6 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

A system for optical-inertial synchronization of the mocap suit and the camera was implemented and described in this paper. In general, the system can find its utilization in applications such as virtual reality, movement analysis, sports evaluation, and biometrics. Using a hybrid mocap system, drift issues of inertial suits can be solved. Moreover, the lack of positioning capability of inertial mocap was solved, and therefore it can be directly used for subject movement analysis in 3D space, ergonomic work analysis process or virtual reality games. The inertial-optical hybrid system is capable of measuring a subject's position with high precision even if partially or fully occluded, and all the computations can be performed in real-time. These results show promising improvement for inertial suit position tracking, but more extensive evaluation is required in the future.

As future work we would like to use the system for an automatic and effortless recalibration of the suit. The correct position and orientation of the joints, evaluated from the camera image, can be used for on-line correction of suit sensors.

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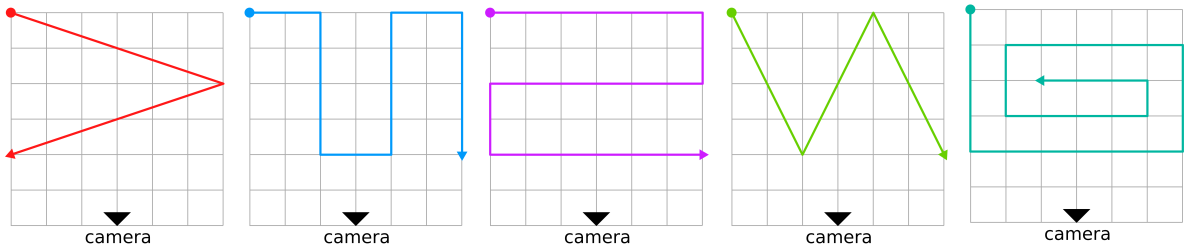

Figure 11: Evaluation of our method on different trajectories within a grid. The grid has a size of 6×6 meters. The patterns were chosen to fully cover the tracking area in different directions. Moreover, different types of movement were used during the evaluation, such as walking, jumping, sliding etc.

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