

3D Piecewise Planar Object Model for Robotics Manipulation

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Abstract—Man-made environments are abundant with planar surfaces which have attractive properties for robotics manipulation tasks and are a prerequisite for a variety of vision tasks. This work presents automatic on-line 3D object model acquisition assuming a robot to manipulate the object. Objects are represented with piecewise planar surfaces in a spatio-temporal graph. Planes once detected as homographies are tracked and serve as priors in subsequent images. After reconstruction of the planes the 3D motion is analyzed and initial object hypotheses are created. In case planes start moving independently a split event is triggered, the spatio-temporal object graph is traced back and visible planes as well as occluded planes are assigned to the most probable split object. The novelty of this framework is to formalize Multi-body Structure-and-Motion (MSaM), that is, to segment interest point tracks into different rigid objects and compute the multiple-view geometry of each object, with Minimal Description Length (MDL) based on model selection of planes in an incremental manner. Thus, object models are built from planes, which directly can be used for robotic manipulation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Increasing interest in enabling robot manipulators to operate in everyday environments leads to the problem of how to acquire object models for manipulation. One does not want to specify all objects and possible obstacles in advance but allow the robot to actively acquire its own models, using the robot’s ability to change view points and to interact with the scene. Many objects in man-made environments consist of planar surfaces, such as tables, shelves or box-shaped packaging. Also curved surfaces can be approximated with sufficient accuracy for most robotics tasks with piecewise planar surfaces, as is common in modelling for computer graphics. Planar surface patches support reasoning about object properties important for manipulation, such as contact points and friction cones, in contrast to models based on distinctive interest points, which typically lead to sparse point sets and are more suitable for recognition.

Our overall goal is to build a cognitive robotic experimentation framework. The rationale behind our system is to enable human tutor driven learning-by-showing as well as completely automatic on-line model acquisition by the robot (see Fig. 1). Schindler et al. [1] use a model selection framework for multibody Structure-from-Motion estimation of image sequences. In contrast we use model selection to detect piecewise planar surfaces. We describe plane hypotheses using the 2D projective transformation (homography) computed from four interest point pairs in two uncalibrated images. In the first step our model is simpler than that

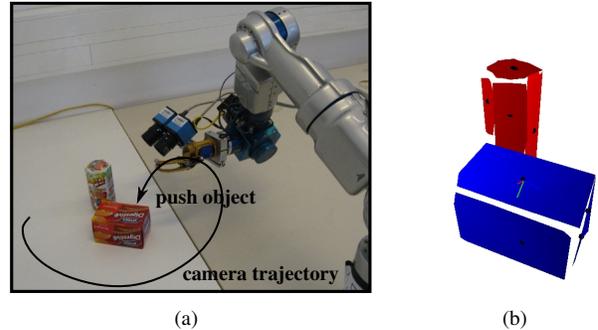


Fig. 1. Example scenario we used to test our system, where a camera moves around objects and pushes them. The image shows a stereo setup, from which we use only a single camera.

of Schindler, but it enables the robot to interact in more realistic environments. After 3D reconstruction of the planes the motion is analyzed and initial object hypotheses are created. In case planes start moving independently a split event is triggered and current visible planes as well as already occluded planes, stored in a temporal object hypotheses graph are assigned to the most plausible split object model. For assignment of the planes a Minimal Description Length (MDL) criterion formalizing the colour distribution and the distance of planes within an object is used. Hence, at each timestamp piecewise planar object models of the current scene are available, which directly can be used for robotic manipulation. In case an interest point descriptor, such as the popular SIFT proposed by Lowe [2] is computed this model can directly be used for object recognition and full pose registration from a single image (see [3]).

After a review of the related work, we give an overview of the system in Section II and its core parts, namely the plane detection (Section II-A), Structure-from-Motion (Section II-B), merging of planes (Section II-C) and splitting of piecewise planar object models (Section II-D). Finally, results of the experiments are shown in Section III.

A. Related work

Although this work focuses on a framework for modelling objects we first want to mention some literature from the field of active vision, which is the motivation for our experiments shown later on and then tackle related work our system is based on. The early attempts on Active Vision, that is an active observer whose purpose is to improve the quality of the perceptual results, goes back to [4], [5]. In [5] Aloimonos et. al stressed that an active observer can solve basic vision problems in a much more efficient way. They introduce a general methodology, in which they believe low-level vision problems should be addressed. Metta et al. [6]

developed an active strategy for a robot to acquire visual experience through simple experimental manipulation. The experiments are oriented towards determining which parts of the environment are physically coherent, that is, which parts will move together, and which are more or less independent. Our experiments are similar, but in contrast to Meta, who studies the causal chains of events we focus on learning a 3D piecewise planar object model triggered by motion events.

The basic parts of our object model are planes. Detecting planes in uncalibrated image sequences is well studied. Most approaches use a hypothesize-and-test framework. A popular method for detecting multiple models is to use the robust estimation method RANSAC [7], to sequentially fit the model to a data set and then to remove inliers. To generate plane hypotheses Vincent et al. [8] use groups of four points which are likely to be coplanar to compute the homography. To increase the likelihood that the points belong to the same plane they select points lying on two different lines in an image. In contrast Kanazawa et al. [9] define a probability for feature points to belong to the same plane using the Euclidean distance between the points. Both approaches use a RANSAC scheme, iteratively detect the dominant plane, remove the inliers and precede with the remaining interest points. The success of the plane computation depends on the coplanarity of four matched points. In [10], [11] different strategies are proposed to sequentially reduce the set of points/lines to three pairs. More recent approaches, such as proposed by Toldo et al. [12] and Chin et al. [13], concentrate on robust estimation of multiple structures to treat hypotheses equally and do not favour planes detected first over subsequent planes by greedily consuming features. These approaches have to create plane hypotheses independently of each other and thus it is not possible to restrict the search space, which leads to higher computational complexity. Our method is most similar to the approach by Prankl et al. [14], who propose incremental model selection based on the MDL principle to overcome these drawbacks.

The planes, represented by homographies, are the basic entities for 3D reconstruction and for merging/splitting to create the final object model. While classical Structure-from-Motion moving through a static scene is essentially solved in a coherent theory [15] and several robust systems exist, in recent years, researchers focused on dynamic scenes composed of rigidly moving objects. The solutions available so far can be broadly classified into algebraic methods [16], [17], which exploit algebraic constraints satisfied by all scene objects, even though they move relative to each other, and non-algebraic methods [18], [19], which essentially combine rigid SfM with segmentation. Most related to our system are the methods proposed by Schindler [1] and by Ozden [20]. They use interleaved segmentation and 3D reconstruction of tracked features into independent objects. Instead of directly sampling features and generating 3D object hypotheses, we incrementally cluster features to planes in 2D using homographies and then reconstruct and merge/split planes into independently moving objects in 3D. Thus in the first step we use a simpler model to more robustly cluster tracked features

Algorithm 1 Piecewise planar object modelling pipeline

- 1) Instantiate new interest points (IPs)
 - 2) Track interest points
 - 3) Track planes modelled by homographies and try to estimate 3D motion for existing objects
 - if** plane does not support 3D motion **then**
 - trigger split event and create new objects from current and past keyframes
 - end if**
 - if** average displacement of the IPs $< d$ pixels **then**
 - **goto** step 1
 - else**
 - init a new keyframe and continue
 - end if**
 - 4) Detect and renew planes
 - 5) Merge and reconstruct planes greedily
 - if** new plane supports active object motion model **then**
 - insert plane
 - else**
 - create new 3D object and motion model (SfM)
 - else if**
 - 6) Refine objects using incremental bundle adjustment
 - 7) **goto** step 1
-

to planes, followed by a second step, reconstruct, merge/split planes and create the final object model. Finally, instead of a sparse point cloud we get a dense representation with planes, which directly can be used for robotic manipulation.

II. SYSTEM

We developed a method to create piecewise planar object models from an uncalibrated image sequence on the fly. The idea is to use a simple model for clustering interest points to planes, which is combined with tracking in an interleaved way and then reconstruct and merge planes to create object hypotheses. In case planes start moving independently a split event is triggered and the history of that object hypothesis is reviewed to assign current visible planes as well as already occluded planes to the best split hypothesis. Hence, we can handle more complex scenes and additionally we get a structural model of planes instead of a sparse point cloud. Algorithm 1 gives a detailed outline of the piecewise planar object modelling pipeline and Fig. 2 depicts the events, that is detection, tracking, merging and splitting of planes.

A. Plane detection using homographies

The idea is to cluster interest points at image level using the 2D projective transformation (homography). Interest points of a plane cluster belong to the same object with a high probability and thus build a reliable part for the following 3D reconstruction.

1) *Algorithm:* We embedded Minimal Description Length (MDL) based model selection in an iterative scheme. Existing planes, tracked from the last images or created in the last iteration compete with newly created hypotheses to

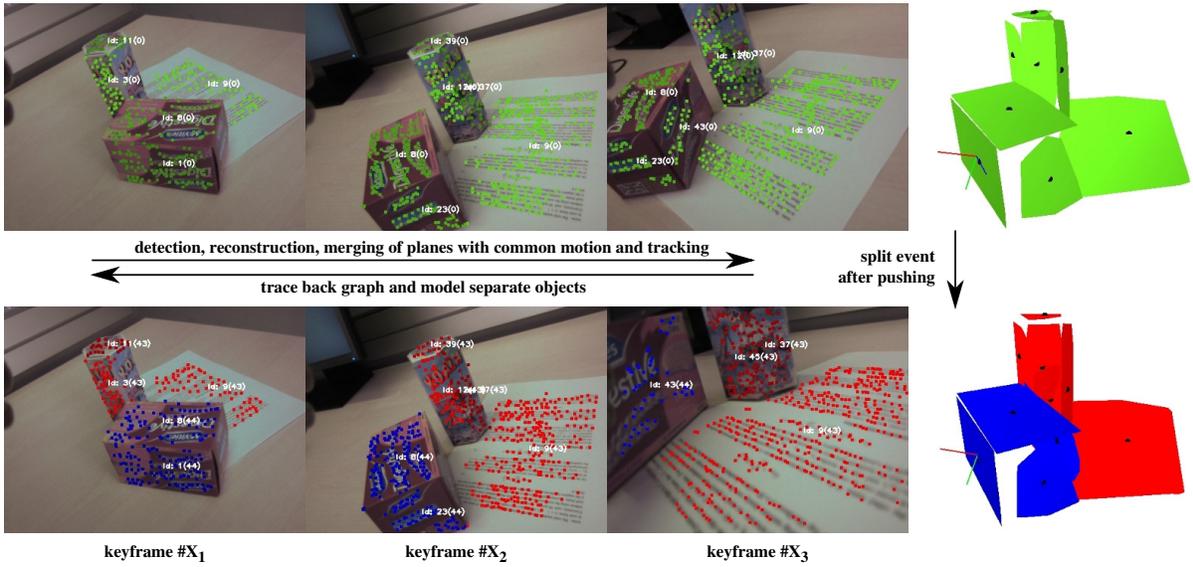


Fig. 2. The upper row shows three keyframes of sequence 1 (897 frames) with detected planes in green which are merged because of common 3D motion. The brightness of the interest points indicates the assignment to different planes. After the gripper (two black dots on the left image border) pushes the plane 43 the keyframe-graph is traced back and the object model (44) and the background object (43) are created (lower image row). Changing plane id's of the top surface of the hexagonal object indicate that planes represented by homographies are substituted with better explanations.

Algorithm 2 Plane detection and tracking

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 $P \leftarrow P_{tracked}, P' \leftarrow 0$ 
 $k \leftarrow 0, \epsilon \leftarrow M/N, S \leftarrow 0$ 
while  $\eta = (1 - \epsilon^M)^k \geq \eta_0$  do
   $P' \leftarrow P$ 
  Add  $Z$  random plane hypotheses to  $P'$ 
  Select plane hypotheses from  $P'$  and store in  $P$ 
  Count number of explained interest points (inliers)  $I$  for  $P$ 
  if  $I > I_{max}$  then
     $I_{max} \leftarrow I$ 
     $\epsilon \leftarrow I_{max}/N$ 
  end if
   $k \leftarrow k + 1$ 
end while

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ensure that interest points are assigned to the best currently available hypothesis. Additionally hypothesis generation is guided to unexplained regions. This method avoids the bias towards dominant planes typical for iterative methods, and it limits the search space which leads to a faster explanation of the entire image in terms of piecewise planar surfaces. Algorithm 2 shows the proposed method for plane detection and tracking. P is initialized with tracked planes of the last image. Then in each iteration a small number Z of new plane hypotheses P' is computed which have to compete with the selected hypotheses P of the last iteration. The termination criterion is based on the true inlier ratio ϵ and the number of samples M which are necessary to compute the homographies. As long as we do not know these values we use the best estimate available up to now. For ϵ that is the ratio of the number of explained interest points I_{max} of the current best plane hypotheses and the number of

matched interest points N to explain. Accordingly M is the number of plane hypotheses currently selected multiplied with the minimal set of interest points $m = 4$ to compute one homography. Furthermore in Algorithm 2 k is the number of iterations, η stands for the probability that no correct set of hypotheses is found and η_0 is the desired failure rate. Due to the incremental scheme it is possible to guide the computation of new hypotheses to unexplained regions.

2) Minimal Description Length based model selection:

In each iteration selected homographies of the last iteration have to compete with newly sampled hypotheses. For the selection, the idea is that the same feature cannot belong to more than one plane. Thus an over-complete set of homographies is generated and the best subset in terms of a Minimum Description Length criterion is chosen. The basic mathematical tool for this is introduced in [21] and adapted in [22]. To select the best model, the savings for each hypothesis h are expressed as

$$S_h = S_{data} - \kappa_1 S_{model} - \kappa_2 S_{error} \quad (1)$$

where in our case S_{data} is the number of interest points N explained by h and S_{model} stands for the cost of coding the model itself. In our case we only have one model (the homography of a plane) and thus $S_{model} = 1$. S_{error} describes the cost for the error added, which we express with the log-likelihood over all interest points f_k of the plane hypothesis h . Experiments have shown that the Gaussian error model in conjunction with an approximation of the log-likelihood comply with the expectations. κ_1 and κ_2 are constants to weight the different factors. Finally the merit term of a model results in

$$s_{ii} = S_h = -\kappa_1 + \sum_{k=1}^N ((1 - \kappa_2) + \kappa_2 p(f_k|h)), \quad (2)$$

where $p(f_k|h)$ is the likelihood that an interest point belongs to the plane hypothesis h . Details for the derivation of (2) can be found in [14]. An interest point can only be assigned to one model. Hence, overlapping models compete for interest points which can be represented by interaction costs

$$s_{ij} = -\frac{1}{2} \sum_{f_k \in h_i \cap h_j} ((1 - \kappa_2) + \kappa_2 \min\{p(f_k|h_i), p(f_k|h_j)\}). \quad (3)$$

Finding the optimal possible set of homographies for the current iteration leads to a Quadratic Boolean Problem (QBP)¹

$$\max_{\mathbf{n}} \mathbf{n}^T S \mathbf{n}, \quad S = \begin{bmatrix} s_{11} & \cdots & s_{1N} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ s_{N1} & \cdots & s_{NN} \end{bmatrix} \quad (4)$$

where $\mathbf{n} = [n_1, n_2, \dots, n_N]$ stands for the indicator vector with $n_i = 1$ if a plane hypothesis is selected and $n_i = 0$ otherwise. Because of iteratively adding plane hypotheses the number of planes leading to the QBP is tractable. Furthermore experiments have shown that a greedy approximation of the QBP gives good results and thus the solution can be found very fast.

B. Structure from Motion (SfM)

The final results of our system are 3D models of objects. Approaching this goal from object reconstruction our system is strongly related to the dynamic SfM frameworks [1], [20]. In [20] Ozden et al. defined the following requirements:

- 1) Determine the number of independently moving objects of a sequence
- 2) Segment the feature tracks into different moving objects in each frame
- 3) Compute their 3D structure and the camera motion for the frame
- 4) Resolve geometric ambiguities
- 5) Robustness to short feature tracks due to occlusion, motion blur, etc.
- 6) Scale to realistic recording times

They propose interleaved segmentation and 3D reconstruction of the feature tracks into independent objects. Instead of directly sampling features and generating 3D object hypotheses we incrementally cluster features to planes in projective space and track them. Thus the first two items as well as the third are approached more robustly with a simpler model in 2D followed by reconstruction, clustering and splitting of planes to objects in 3D.

For reconstruction of the planes we use a standard SfM pipeline similar to Nister et al. [23]. The nonlinear refined homography is directly decomposed to initialize the first camera pose (see [24]). In the following frames the relative motion from C^{-1} to C is estimated using RANSAC [7] and a direct least squares solution between the two point

¹QBP assumes pairwise interaction, which in our case can be violated. But this is still a good approximation because interaction always increases cost, yielding a desirable bias against weak hypotheses.

sets (cp. Haralick et al. [25]). A sparse bundle adjustment implementation by Lourakis [26] over the last N frames is used to refine camera pose and 3D points of the plane. Once a plane is reconstructed our algorithm tries to incorporate planes greedily in case of consistent motion.

C. Merging of planes with consistent motion

Merging of planes amounts to checking whether the motion of a new plane is consistent with the motion of an existing object. In contrast to Schindler et al. [1] we aim at building individual object models and thus, once an object is split we do not merge them again if they start moving together. Hence, it is possible that several objects with the same motion are tracked at the same time and a new plane moves consistent with more than one object. If merging would be done only because of consistent motion this plane would be assigned to one of the objects just by chance. Therefore a pseudo-likelihood depending on motion, colour and the 3D interest point adjacency is introduced and planes are assigned to the object with a higher probability. Analogous to (2) the formulation

$$p_{ij} = -\nu_1 + \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N \left((1 - \nu_2) + \nu_2 p(f_{i,k}^{proj} | H_j) \right) + \nu_3 p^*(a_i | A_j) \quad (5)$$

is used to assign the plane i to the object j with the higher likelihood p_{ij} , where $p(f_{i,k}^{proj} | H_j)$ is the probability that an interest point of a plane i belongs to the 3D object H_j . This is modelled using a Gaussian error model. The camera pose of object j is used to compute 3D points for plane i and the projections are compared to the corresponding tracked image points. ν denote constants to weight the different factors, where ν_1 is an offset which must be reached to be considered as moving together and ν_3 is a weighting factor to reduce the influence of the appearance model $p^*(a_i | A_j)$ and primarily merge depending on the motion. The appearance model

$$p^*(a_i | A_j) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=1}^N \left((1 - \nu_4) + \nu_4 p(f_{i,k}^{3D} | H_j) \right) + \log(p(c_i | C_j)) \quad (6)$$

combines interest point adjacency and the colour in a probabilistic manner. Interest point adjacency (first term) is based on a probabilistic voting scheme. For this a neighbourhood graph of all currently available 3D points is constructed. This graph is used to compute the mean μ and the standard deviation σ of the length of edges which connect points of the same plane. Then μ and σ are used to compute Gaussian votes $p(f_{i,k}^{3D} | H_j)$, where each 3D point of a target plane votes for the nearest object and thus the object which is close to the plane accumulates more votes and gets a higher probability that the plane belongs to that object. The second term models the colour distribution of the objects. For this we build the $8 \times 8 \times 8$ colour histogram c_i of the target plane i and the histogram C_j of the object j to which the plane should be assigned. We use normalized rgb colours to

be insensitive to brightness differences of object planes. The border of the plane is approximated by the convex hull of the interest points. For comparison of colour models we use the Bhattacharyya coefficient

$$p(c_i|C_j) \sim \sum_q \sqrt{c_i(q)C_j(q)}. \quad (7)$$

Hence, the probability of a plane i which has to be assigned to an object j consists of a probabilistic vote of each interest point to the nearest object and a probability describing the colour similarity. Being aware that merging of planes based on colour and 3D interest point adjacency is a critical point, experiments have shown that for our scenarios, where only a few objects are modelled simultaneously, this is a good second merging criterion next to motion.

D. Separating planes in case of different motions

We trigger object modelling if an object separates, that is, planes start moving differently. Therefore in (5), which is used to continuously test if planes start moving separately, ν_3 is set to zero and first visible planes are separated only because of motion without using colour and shape. Then past observations, where the planes had a common motion are examined. If the camera moves around an object and planes could not be tracked because of (self-)occlusion (6) is used to assign them to the new object with the higher probability. Therefore we represent objects in a keyframe² based graph structure. Each observation of an object is assigned to a keyframe and linked to an observation in the previous as well as in the next keyframe. Thus the object itself is stored distributed within the graph structure and each observation holds the current pose to the reference frame and the appearance modelled with interest points and the colour histogram. Fig. 2 depicts an event chain where planes are merged because of common motion, start moving separately and thus the object is split and new object models are built by tracing back the graph and assigning occluded planes to the object with the higher probability.

III. EXPERIMENTS

For all experiments we use a KLT-tracker [27]. In [28] it has been shown that a sub-pixel refinement essentially improves pose estimation. Hence, we use the affine refined location of the interest points with sub-pixel accuracy and finally compute a non-linear optimized homography using *homest* [29].

To test our system we use five videos each with about 800 frames. Motivated by our cognitive robotic scenarios the sequences show packaging of arbitrary shapes typically found in a supermarket (see Fig. 2). We placed two different objects on a table and manually moved camera and gripper around them in a way that one half of the objects is already occluded before the gripper pushes one object. The goal of the experiments is that our system detects the planes,

²In our system keyframes are a subset of frames of the whole video sequence, which are automatically selected for plane detection or in case a split event occurs.

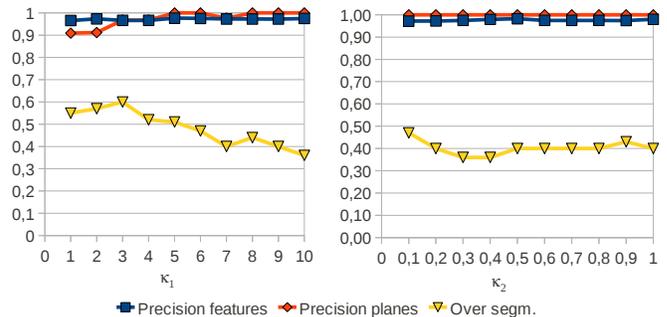


Fig. 3. Parameter optimisation

reconstructs, tracks and merges them depending on common motion and finally, after pushing one object, creates two separate piecewise planar object models.

Three numbers are computed to compare the results, that is the feature based precision

$$p_{f,pr} = \frac{n_{f,tp}}{n_{f,tp} + n_{f,fp}} \quad (8)$$

which is the ratio of the number of inliers $n_{f,tp}$ correctly located on a ground truth plane and the total number of features per detected plane $n_{f,tp} + n_{f,fp}$. The second number is the over-segmentation-rate

$$p_{ov} = \frac{n_{p,fp}}{n_{p,tp} + n_{p,fp}} \quad (9)$$

per plane which indicates how often a plane is replaced during tracking. $n_{p,fp}$ the number of false positives is the number of detected planes minus the number of correctly detected planes $n_{p,tp}$. Furthermore we computed the plane based accuracy

$$p_{pl,pr} = \frac{n_{p,tp}}{n_{p,tp} + n_{p,fp}} \quad (10)$$

which describes the ratio of the correctly detected planes $n_{p,tp}$ and the total number of detected planes $n_{p,tp} + n_{p,fp}$.

A. Plane detection

To test the plane detection we selected 30 keyframes and manually marked a total number of about 150 planes. With the first video sequence we tested the behaviour of the parameters of our algorithm. Fig. 3 shows our performance measures for the parameter $\kappa_1 = [1 \dots 10]$ and $\kappa_2 = [0 \dots 1]$. It can be seen that our algorithm is quite robust against variation of the parameters. Fig. 3 (left) shows, that the Parameter κ_1 mostly influences the over-segmentation-rate while the plane based precision slightly increases. The feature based precision $p_{f,pr}$ and the plane based precision $p_{pl,pr}$ are almost constant in Fig. 3 (right) and the over-segmentation-rate has a minimum for $\kappa_2 = 0.3$.

The results for all five videos are shown in Table I. It can be seen that our algorithm did not detect a totally wrong plane ($p_{pl,pr} = 1$) while in some cases interest points match a plane by chance ($p_{f,pr} \approx 0.97$). The over-segmentation-rate p_{ov} would be zero, if in the final 3D object model each manually marked plane is reconstructed by exactly one plane. Our plane detection/tracking algorithm is designed to

sequence	$p_{f,pr}$	$p_{pl,pr}$	p_{ov}	time per frame [s]
1	0.97	1.0	0.40	0.25
2	0.98	1.0	0.25	0.18
3	0.93	1.0	0.43	0.15
4	0.99	1.0	NA	0.19
5	0.99	1.0	0.60	0.26

TABLE I
RESULTS OF OUR FIVE VIDEO SEQUENCES.

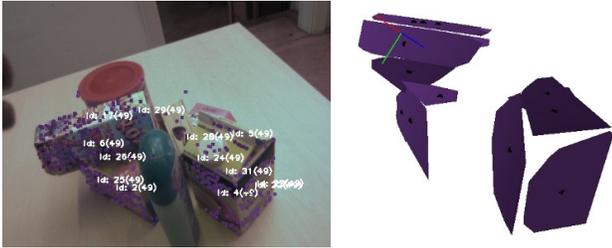


Fig. 8. Example image and reconstruction of a small more complex sequence which shows the limits of our system. Planes of the three dominant objects at the front are reconstructed, while the object at the centre of the image and the objects at the background are not detected because of low texture and too few features.

subdivide planes if a better explanation can be obtained in terms of smaller planes. The final object model consists of all these planes and thus is $p_{ov} \approx 0.4$. Furthermore the p_{ov} is not zero because sometimes the manually marked planes are indeed not flat but a little bit curved.

B. Reconstruction

Fig. 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 show the qualitative results of our system. Planes merged to one object are drawn with the same colour, whereas the brightness of interest points indicates the assignment to different planes. In each figure the third image of each row shows the perspective of the camera shortly before/after the object is pushed and the last one depicts the reconstructed objects. Fig. 2 shows the whole event chain, that is, detection, reconstruction and merging of planes with a common motion coloured green and separating planes as they start moving independently (indicated in red and blue). In the Sequences 1, 2, 4 and 5, shown in Fig. 2, 4, 6 and 7 object modelling was successful and accurate as expected. The 3D reconstruction (right image of each row) shows that sometimes parts of an object, which we intuitively would mark as one plane are split. That is on the one hand, because these planes are indeed not flat but a little bit curved and on the other hand model selection within our plane detection algorithm replaces a plane in the following keyframes if a better, more complete/accurate plane is found. Fig. 5 shows one of the failures which might occur. These two objects have approximately the same height and thus one joined explanation was favoured instead of two separate. Fig. 7 and 8 show the limits of our system. Our reconstruction relies on planes modelled by homographies and thus for one plane a theoretical minimum number of five interest points are necessary (4 + 1 which supports the homography). Because of reliability issues we used a threshold of 10. Hence, in Fig. 7 even though a small plane is detected (shown in the middle image, plane with $id = 17$) the top of the cleaner

bottle is completely lost. In Fig. 8 the object in the middle, which has hardly any texture and the finer scene details at the background are invisible for our system whereas the three prominent objects are nicely recovered.

IV. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER WORK

We explored how robot motion can be used to learn more about unknown objects in a home or service robot task. Using our approach it is possible to model the object surface from pushing the parts. If accidentally several objects are pushed, different motion will occur and they will be modelled as two different items. We formalize model selection with Minimal Description Length (MDL) to incrementally cluster features to planes in 2D using homographies and then reconstruct and merge/split planes into independently moving objects in 3D. Merging as well as splitting is triggered based on a probability which combines 3D motion, structure and colour information of the planes. Consistent with plane detection this is formalized with MDL. Instead of a sparse point cloud, which is typical for Multi-body Structure-and-Motion, we get a dense representation with planes, which directly can be used for robotic manipulation. For future work we want to introduce more complex object models where parts are linked with joints, e.g., scissors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme [FP7/2007-2013] under grant agreement No. 215181, CogX and No. 215821, GRASP.

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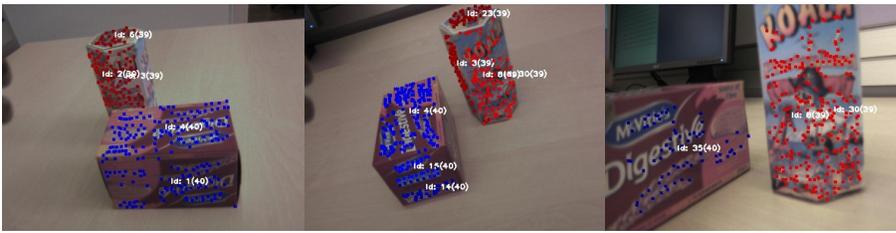


Fig. 4. Sequence 2 (715 frames).

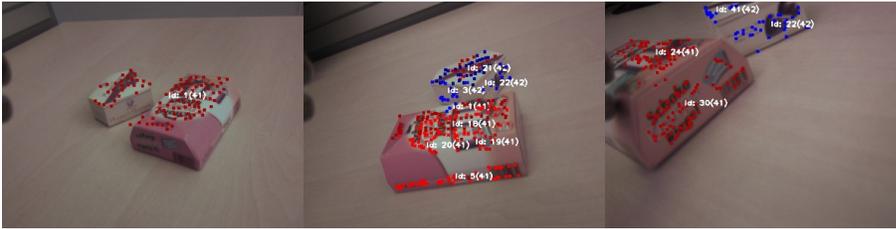


Fig. 5. Sequence 3 (543 frames).

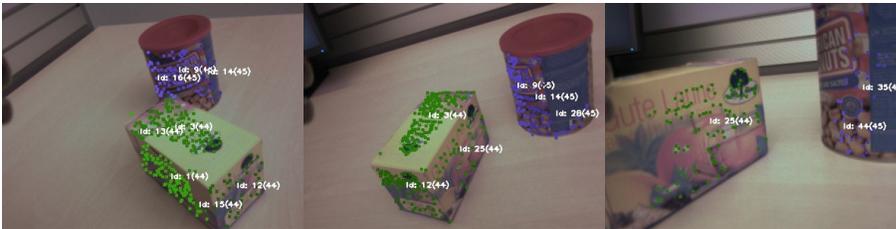


Fig. 6. Sequence 4 (870 frames).

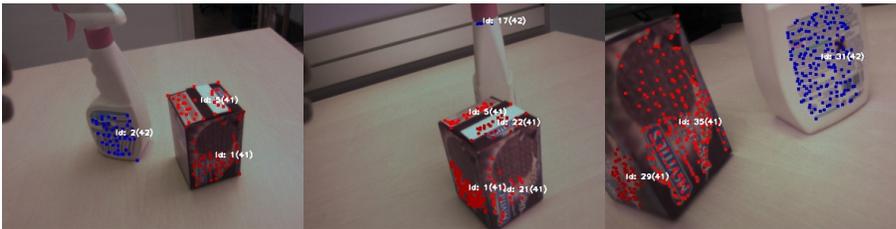


Fig. 7. Sequence 5 (811 frames).

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