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► **To cite this version:**

Vincent Padois, Jean-Yves Fourquet, Pascale Chiron, Aurélien Mauratille. Reactive behavior and dynamic sequencing for nonholonomic mobile manipulators. 3rd International Conference on Computational Intelligence, Robotics and Autonomous Systems, Dec 2005, Singapour, Singapore. hal-00624394

HAL Id: hal-00624394

<https://hal.science/hal-00624394>

Submitted on 19 Sep 2011

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Reactive Behavior and dynamic sequencing for nonholonomic mobile manipulators

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Abstract

This work is devoted to planning and execution of complex missions in Robotics. It is organized around a complex mission: “Go around obstacles to the blackboard and write” for mobile manipulators that have capabilities of locomotion and manipulation. It is a simple and intuitive example of a complex mission that relies on different sensors, exhibits different operating modes and needs to switch between different feedbacks and set-points. It is focused on dynamical sequencing of control laws that ensures good transients, robustness and allows to update the mission at every transition from one mode to another. Simulation have been realized with matlab Simulink and Stateflow toolboxes and experimental validation has been developed within the G^{en} om controller on the h_2bis nonholonomic mobile manipulator.

I. Introduction

For many years, research community in robotics has proposed numerous solutions allowing manipulators and, more recently, **mobile manipulators** to solve specific tasks. In the literature, contributions concerning the motion in free space of the end-effector, whose location is denoted ξ , are clearly separated from the ones dealing with constrained motion for which contact force f is imposed together with ξ . In the first ones, it is assumed that no contact force can occur whereas the second category considers that the contact is realized from the beginning. Regarding manipulators, many modeling issues – at dynamic and kinematic level – and related control schemes can be found in reference textbooks [15], [14], [9]. Methods and models have also been proposed to deal with the control of mobile manipulators. Modeling issues can be found in [2], [4] and control issues are exposed in [16], [18].

Thus, the approach generally adopted when considering a complex problem is to decompose it in a sequence of elementary subproblems, and then to solve independently each subproblem. This approach has the merit to permit the study of each step of the sequence in a simple way since it disregards the other steps. It is particularly suited when the environment can be adapted to the task and when this task is repetitive enough to deserve *ad hoc* tuning. These features are usual in an industrial framework that requires a low versatility of the robotic system.

Now, new directions, both in service and manufacturing robotics, lead to embed these techniques in missions where uncertainty and variability are much more important. Wheeled locomotion, for instance, naturally produces positioning uncertainty. Environment is less calibrated and tasks are less repetitive. At the same time, it seems pertinent to build the solution from the library of classical methods by chaining them dynamically. So, it is necessary to adapt and combine existing strategies for local tasks in order to realize complex missions with good transients.

Even if the objectives of our work are more general, the work presented here is sufficiently rich to point out problems and features of a more generic complex mission in robotics. It is organized around one kind of mission:

From an imposed end-effector location, a free space end-effector motion among obstacles is followed by a trajectory tracking over a surface along which a normal force is imposed,

and around one kind of system: *A **nonholonomic mobile manipulator**, kinematically redundant, built from a serial arm mounted on a wheeled mobile platform. This system is equipped with a force sensor that measures contact forces at the end-effector.*

At the end of the paper, simulation illustrates how the same approach allow to follow a real-time interactively imposed end-effector motion.

We made the choice of a description based on the Hybrid Dynamical Systems formalism where switchings among a finite number of modes occur when particular events are detected. Modes are linked to different set-points and control laws. The emphasis is made on the dynamical nature of the sequence of elementary modes and more particularly on the contact transition problem (*i. e.* transition from free space to constrained effector motion). This issue has been emphasized very early for manipulators [12] but only a little number of authors has actually studied it (*e. g.* [10], [7], [17]). These works mainly deal with stability issues and impact modeling. Recently, Yu and Pagilla [20] have presented a method that allows to cope with geometric uncertainties of the contact surface location. Doh *et al.* [5] have also proposed a specific control law that aims at avoiding large bounces during hard contact transitions. With regard to mobile manipulators, the contact transition problem is an emerging field of research that has not been extensively studied yet. Nonetheless, one can refer to the work of Nagatani *et al.* [11] focused on static chaining of primitives (“*Open the door*”) but also to the

work of Kang *et al.* [8] focused on the utilization of inertial effect when controlling holonomic mobile manipulators.

II. Structuring and planning the mission

In our approach a mission is described by:

- k modes or local tasks,
- a switching pattern that describes the sequencing of the local tasks.

The switching pattern can be represented using a finite state machine. States corresponds to modes and transitions are activated by events: time elapsed or detection of a sensor threshold value. Using this formal description and the mission parameters, a first off-line planning step leads to “a *perfect plan*” that describes the ideal temporal evolution of the variables to control (*i. e.* the set-points or trajectories to track) and contains the calculated threshold values and time windows needed to define the transition conditions between modes. A state machine is then instantiated with these values. During the mission, this instantiated state machine creates indicators used to switch between the different phases of the plan and among a set of control schemes. At each transition, the “*perfect plan*” is updated thanks to the different signals and values of the variables describing the mission (*e. g.* the relative situation of the end-effector in the environment frame is updated at contact time).

This update allows to cope with uncertainties due to poor parameter estimations of both the robot (drift of the platform, sensors resolution) and the environment. Thus, transition from a task to the following one occurs asynchronously but in a predictable time (or space) interval. Any large drift in the transition date or in the value of a controlled variable corresponds to an anomaly that cannot be interpreted as the result of these uncertainties and leads to a premature stop of the mission.

III. Modeling of a mobile manipulator

We consider the case of mobile manipulator composed of a mobile platform with two independent driving wheels and a serial manipulator with n_b joints. Such a system is depicted on figure 2 in a planar version or on figure 1 in a 3-dimensional version. This latter is the one used for the experiments. It has velocity controlled joints with high ratio gear reduction (*i. e.* the torque at each joints cannot directly be controlled) and so needs to rely on kinematic control schemes. Thus, we hereafter present some kinematics modeling results regarding mobile manipulators based on Bayle *et al.* work [2], [3]. We also shortly introduce the inertia matrix of this kind of mobile manipulator. Indeed, we later show that a rough estimation of the parameters of this matrix can be useful for a better control of the robot during transition from free space to contact.



Fig. 1. *H2bis*: a 3-dimensional mobile manipulator.

A. Mobile manipulator kinematics

The configuration of such a mobile manipulator is completely defined using vector $\mathbf{q} = [\mathbf{q}_b \ \mathbf{q}_p]^T$ where $\mathbf{q}_b = [q_{b1} \ \dots \ q_{bn_b}]^T$ and $\mathbf{q}_p = [\theta_r \ \theta_l \ x_{Op} \ y_{Op} \ \vartheta]^T$ respectively represents the manipulator configuration and the platform configuration. Its end-effector situation (*i. e.* situation of $\mathcal{R}_{EE} = (O_{EE}, \vec{x}_{EE}, \vec{y}_{EE}, \vec{z}_{EE})$ in $\mathcal{R} = (O, \vec{x}, \vec{y}, \vec{z})$) can be described using a minimal set of parameters $\xi = [\xi_1 \ \dots \ \xi_m]^T$. ξ is expressed as a non linear function of \mathbf{q} . Differentiating it, the relation between $\dot{\xi}$ and $\dot{\mathbf{q}}$ is given by:

$$\dot{\xi} = J(\mathbf{q})\dot{\mathbf{q}} \text{ with } J(\mathbf{q}) \text{ a } m \times n \text{ matrix and } n = n_b + 5. \quad (1)$$

In addition, the components of $\dot{\mathbf{q}}$ are constrained by the nonholonomy of the platform (*i. e.* the wheels can not slip). Then, one can define a vector $\mathbf{u} = [\mathbf{u}_b \ \mathbf{u}_p]$ of independent parameters (*i. e.* taking the nonholonomic constraints into account) such as:

$$\dot{\mathbf{q}} = T(\mathbf{q})\mathbf{u}. \quad (2)$$

Defining $\bar{J}(\mathbf{q})$ as:

$$\bar{J}(\mathbf{q}) = J(\mathbf{q})T(\mathbf{q}), \quad (3)$$

equation (1) becomes :

$$\dot{\xi} = \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})\mathbf{u}. \quad (4)$$

Equation (4) completely describes the mobile manipulator kinematics. This model is called *instantaneous posture kinematic model* in [1]. A natural choice for $\mathbf{u} \in \mathcal{R}^{\bar{n}}$ ($\bar{n} = n_b + 2$) is $\mathbf{u}_b = \mathbf{q}_b$ and \mathbf{u}_p can be chosen as $[\dot{\theta}_r \ \dot{\theta}_l]^T$ or $[v \ \omega]^T$. v and ω are respectively the linear and angular velocities of the platform and when no slipping actually occurs, one can verify that:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \dot{\theta}_r \\ \dot{\theta}_l \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} -\frac{1}{r} & -\frac{b}{r} \\ \frac{1}{r} & -\frac{b}{r} \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} v \\ \omega \end{bmatrix}. \quad (5)$$

When $m < \bar{n}$, the mobile manipulator is said to be kinematically redundant. This property provides the capability

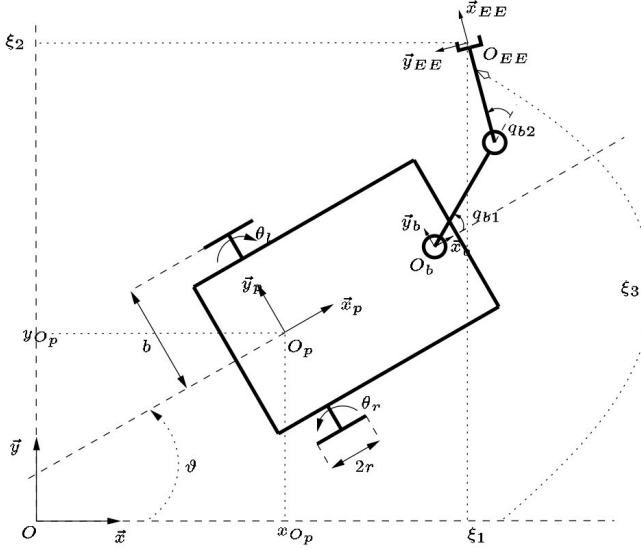


Fig. 2. A planar mobile manipulator.

to choose a particular kinematic control vector \mathbf{u} among those giving the prescribed end-effector velocity $\dot{\xi}$ by using the relation:

$$\mathbf{u} = \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\# \dot{\xi} + (I - \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\# \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})) \mathbf{z}, \quad (6)$$

where $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\#$ is any generalized inverse of $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})$ and \mathbf{z} any $\bar{n} \times 1$ vector.

Access to the kinematic redundancy of the system is given by the second right-hand term of equation (6) also called the internal motion control term since it does not provide any end-effector motion.

Remark 1: A particular set of generalized inverse of $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})$ is called generalized pseudo-inverses. When $m \leq \bar{n}$ and $\text{rank}(\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})) = m$, these generalized inverse are defined as:

$$\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^* = M_x^{-1} \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^T [\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q}) M_x^{-1} \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^T]^{-1}, \quad (7)$$

where $M_x \in \mathcal{R}^{\bar{n} \times \bar{n}}$ is a positive definite symmetric matrix. Replacing $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\#$ by $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^*$ in (6) leads to the solution minimizing the M_x -weighted euclidean norm of $(\mathbf{u} - \mathbf{z})$. For $M_x = I$, $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^*$ is called the pseudo-inverse or right inverse of matrix $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})$. It is usually denoted $\bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^+$. Detailed results and proofs regarding generalized inversion are presented in [6].

B. Mobile manipulator inertia

Using Lagrange's technique to derive the dynamic model of the mobile manipulator and choosing $\mathbf{u}_p = [\dot{\theta}_r \ \dot{\theta}_l]^T$ as control vector for the platform, we obtain an inertia matrix with the following structure:

$$A(\mathbf{q}_b) = \begin{bmatrix} A_p + A_{bp}(\mathbf{q}_b) & A_{b/p}(\mathbf{q}_b) \\ A_{p/b}(\mathbf{q}_b) & A_b(\mathbf{q}_b) \end{bmatrix}, \quad (8)$$

where:

- A_p is the platform inertia matrix which is independent of its configuration,
- $A_b(\mathbf{q}_b)$ is the manipulator inertia matrix,
- $A_{bp}(\mathbf{q}_b)$ is a coupling term due to the influence of the arm on the inertia of the platform,
- and $A_{b/p}(\mathbf{q}_b)$ and $A_{p/b}(\mathbf{q}_b)$ are the coupling terms representing the influence of each subsystem motion on the other.

Yamamoto has shown in [18], using simulations, the prevalence of the effect of the platform motion on the manipulator.

C. Operational kinematic control

Operational kinematic control uses a two stages control structure. The first stage is at the actuator level. Each actuator has its own velocity control loop. In our case, these controllers are digital PID regulators. The second stage is at end-effector level. Given $\dot{\xi}^*$ and ξ^* desired end-effector speed and situation to track, and a positive definite weighting matrix W_{reg} , the control vector defined by:

$$\mathbf{u} = \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\# (\dot{\xi}^* + W_{reg}(\xi^* - \xi)) + (I - \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})^\# \bar{\mathcal{J}}(\mathbf{q})) \mathbf{z}, \quad (9)$$

ensures an asymptotic decreasing of $e = \xi^* - \xi$ toward 0.

In order to take advantage of the kinematic redundancy of the system, we can determine \mathbf{z} such as to minimize a scalar function $\mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q})$, also called *potential function*. The "steepest descent" local optimization method consists in choosing $\dot{\mathbf{q}}$ such as:

$$\dot{\mathbf{q}} + W_{grad} \nabla \mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q}) = 0, \quad (10)$$

where $W_{grad} \in \mathcal{R}^{n \times n}$ is a positive definite weighting matrix and $\nabla \mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q})$ is the gradient of $\mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q})$. This choice ensures an evolution of the system configuration tending to locally minimize $\mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q})$. However, $\dot{\mathbf{q}}$ components have to be independent which is not the case for a mobile manipulator. Thus, one have to adapt this method as done in [1]. This adaptation leads to choose \mathbf{z} as:

$$\mathbf{z} = -T(\mathbf{q})^+ W_{grad} \nabla \mathcal{P}(\mathbf{q}). \quad (11)$$

D. Hybrid speed / force controller

The hybrid speed / force controller is a modified version of the well known work presented in [13].

Once the contact established, the robot's end-effector cannot independently exert a displacement and a force in the same direction. One has to choose the direction to be position or speed controlled and the direction to be force controlled. \vec{n}_c being the unit vector normal to the environment surface at contact point, a smart choice for the reference frame \mathcal{R} is $\vec{x} = -\vec{n}_c$. Thus, one can create a $m \times m$ diagonal selection matrix S where ones or zeros are placed on the diagonal respectively to indicate whether the component of ξ corresponding to the line in S is speed or force controlled. The control vector is then calculated as the sum of three terms:

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{u}_s + \mathbf{u}_f + \mathbf{u}_r, \quad (12)$$

with:

$$\mathbf{u}_s = \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})^\# S \dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_s, \quad (13)$$

$$\mathbf{u}_f = \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})^\# (I - S) \dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_f, \quad (14)$$

$$\mathbf{u}_r = (I - \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})^\# \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})) \mathbf{z}. \quad (15)$$

$\dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_s$ and $\dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_f$ are the control vectors whose simple versions are given by:

$$\dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_s = \dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}^* + W_{reg_s}(\boldsymbol{\xi}^* - \boldsymbol{\xi}), \quad (16)$$

and:

$$\dot{\boldsymbol{\xi}}_f = W_{reg_f}(\mathbf{f}^* - \mathbf{f}), \quad (17)$$

where W_{reg_s} and W_{reg_f} are two positive definite weighting matrices.

E. Use of redundancy

We expose here a set of functions to optimize using the internal motion. Many other functions may be used but these ones seem to be relevant according to the considered mission.

1) *Manipulability maximization*: The manipulability notion was first introduced for manipulators (*cf.* [19] for a detailed presentation of this notion) but was also extended to mobile manipulators in [3]. The different manipulability measures are quantitative indicators representing the ease to instantly move the end-effector in any direction. Maximizing any of these indicators tends to avoid singular configuration of the system and thus to avoid high joints speed.

2) *Impact force reduction*: During the transition tasks, it is interesting to re-configure the mobile manipulator using internal motion so as to give it good inertial properties. Results concerning holonomic mobile manipulators are presented in [8]. The notion of impulse force \hat{F} is used in [17] and is defined as:

$$\hat{F} = \lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \int_t^{t+\Delta t} \mathbf{f}(s) ds, \quad (18)$$

where t is the impact time. Using the dynamic model of the system (*i. e.* the model establishing the relation between physical effects of motion, actuating torques and contact forces at end-effector level), the magnitude \hat{F} of \hat{F} is expressed as:

$$\hat{F} = \frac{-(1+e)\mathbf{v}_{impact}^T \mathbf{n}_c}{\mathbf{n}_c^T C(\mathbf{q}) \mathbf{n}_c}. \quad (19)$$

\mathbf{v}_{impact}^T is defined as the linear speed of the end-effector at the impact time, e is the restitution coefficient (*i. e.* a physical characteristic of the contact). Using equation (8), one can define the pseudo-inertia matrix of the system as:

$$\Lambda(\mathbf{q}) = (\bar{J}(\mathbf{q}) A(\mathbf{q}_b)^{-1} \bar{J}(\mathbf{q})^T)^{-1}. \quad (20)$$

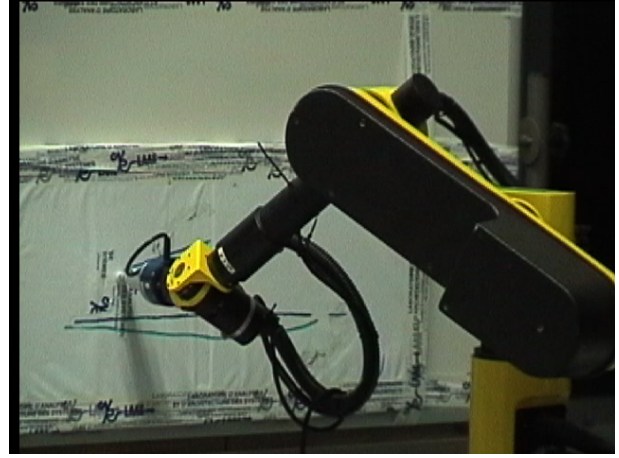


Fig. 3. Writing on a board with a mobile manipulator

$\Lambda(\mathbf{q})$ represents the part of the system inertia having effects on the end-effector motion. $C(\mathbf{q})$ is a matrix extracted from $\Lambda(\mathbf{q})^{-1}$ that corresponds to linear acceleration terms in $\Lambda(\mathbf{q})^{-1}$.

To minimize \hat{F} , one can:

- plan a low impact speed but uncertainties in the plan execution lead to higher values of impact speed than the planned one,
- maximize, using internal motion, $\mathbf{n}_c^T C(\mathbf{q}) \mathbf{n}_c$ which is configuration dependent. It directly acts on the inertial properties of the manipulator.

3) *Collision avoidance*: Techniques to avoid obstacles have extensively been studied in the case of mobile robots. However, the problem to solve here depends on the nature of the task to perform. Is the goal to follow an obstacle (like during a writing task on the wall) or to go around an obstacle (like in free space end-effector motion). Different potential functions have been defined depending on what kind of collision avoidance is expected.

IV. Experimental system and simulation results

The "go to the blackboard and write" mission has been validated on the experimental mobile manipulator (see 3) and impact reduction has been shown experimentally.

In this paper, the focus is more on simulation results. In simulation, this mission has been realized in a robust manner with obstacles. Also, a joystick demo has been realized that allow for real-time setpoint generation. We hereafter detail the experimental and simulation frameworks and we then present some results obtained using the simulator.

A. Experimental framework

The mobile platform is actuated using two independent driving wheels (*i. e.* an HILARE type platform). The

manipulator is a 6R serial arm called GT6A. The whole system is controlled using on board calculators equipped with the real time operating system *VxWorks* system and running on *Motorola 68000* and *Apple Power PC* cards.

Localization devices such as ultrasonic sensors, a teleme-ter and a black and white camera are present on the system. Of course, we could use those sensors. However uncertainty associated to the kind of mission we study would still be present. So, to clearly delimit the framework of this study, we chose to rely only on the platform's odometer system, the manipulator's incremental coders and a 6-axis *GIROBO* force / torque sensor.

Control algorithms are implemented using *G^{en}om*, a generator of software control modules developed, as well as the robot, in the *RIA* team of the *LAAS* laboratory. At actuator level, the control sampling time is 5ms (the smaller one admitted by the control modules) whereas at operational level we chose it to be either 10 or 20ms. Force sensor bandwidth is 100Hz.

B. Simulation framework

The simulator has been developed using *Matlab* and *Simulink*.

1) *Robot*: The robot is modeled at kinematic and dynamic level as a continuous system. Actuators (*dc motors*) are modeled as second order linear systems and we take into account load torques due to dynamic effects of motion or due to contact. We also take into account saturations of the actuators.

2) *Sensors*: Only the noise and inaccuracy of the force sensor are modeled. Force signal is sampled with a period of 10ms to reflect the effects of its limited bandwidth.

3) *Contact*: Contact between the end-effector and the environment is locally modeled either as a *{spring // damper}* system (*i. e.* Kelvin-Voigt visco-elastic model) or as a spring system. When running simulations, we consider that the values of the parameters characterizing the contact are unknown or poorly estimated.

4) *Controllers*: Actuators' controllers are modeled as digital PID regulators whose sampling time is 5ms. The operational level controller is also implemented as a digital controller. We consider its sampling time as an off-line tunable parameter whose minimum value is 10ms.

C. Simulation results

System depicted on figure 2 is chosen for simulation. ξ is chosen as the end-effector position and $\mathbf{u} = [\dot{\theta}_r \ \dot{\theta}_l \ \dot{q}_{b1} \ \dot{q}_{b2}]^T$. The reference frame is attached to the blackboard whose surface is defined by equation $x = 0$. Thus, \mathbf{f} is defined as the vector whose components are the normal and tangential force to the blackboard. Once the contact established, the normal direction is force controlled

whereas the tangential direction is speed controlled. So, the selection matrix S is given by:

$$S = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}.$$

1) *Simulation 1: go to the blackboard among obstacles and write*: Here the end-effector motion is imposed and the mobile base has to avoid low obstacles reactively. There is only a local information about the location and number of obstacles. The dynamic sequencing scheme switches automatically between indices : manipulability, obstacle avoidance, inertia, ... The imposed end-effector motion is made of the two blue straight lines and the path of the middle of the rear axle of the mobile base is depicted in red.

2) *Simulation 2: interactive joystick* : Here, the control scheme is used interactively since the end-effector velocity is imposed in real time. Again, the real-time imposed end-effector motion is in blue whereas the path of the middle of the rear axle of the mobile base is depicted in red. This simulation shows the robustness of the control scheme and the ability to realize totally reactive behaviour with a nonholonomic mobile manipulator. In particular, cusps or manoeuvres are automatically generated.

V. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to propose a method to obtain dynamic task sequencing for nonholonomic mobile manipulators. The method is based on the decomposition of complex mission in elementary tasks to sequence. A particular attention is paid to transition phases. A simulator, taking into account the physical system's constraints, was developed and allows to test different control structures and schemes. The obtained results show the efficiency of the proposed method. In particular, a smart use of the kinematic redundancy of the system allows to correctly control the contact transition phase. The principle of the proposed approach was validated using simulation and has been confirmed experimentally on robot *H₂bis*.

Acknowledgment: This work is partially supported by the French CNRS Robea program within the project *Dynamic sequencing of multi-sensor based tasks for complex motions execution in mobile robotics*

LGP-ENIT is a partner of the Innovative Production Machines and Systems (I*PROMS) Network of Excellence funded by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme (Contract n° FP6-2002-500273-2).

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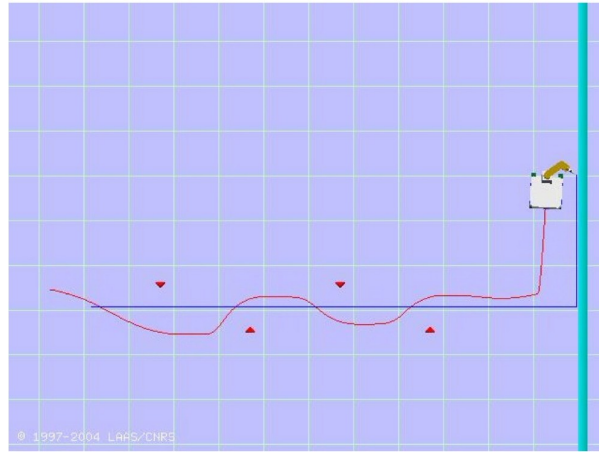


Fig. 4. Go to the blackboard among obstacles and write

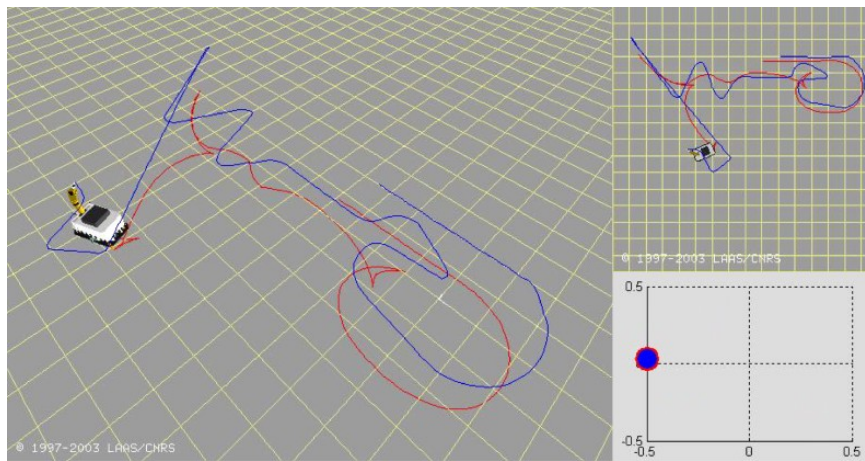


Fig. 5. Interactive real-time end effector setpoint

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