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System identification meets the Gaussian process

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Joint work mainly with **Adrian Wills** at the University of Newcastle, Australia.

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Motivation – why use the GP in system identification?

A few concrete applications include:

1. GP-based impulse response estimation
2. Develop a linearly constrained GP
3. GP-based nonlinear state space model
4. Maximum likelihood learning of nonlinear SSM
 - Stochastic quasi-Newton algorithm (much more general)
5. ...

Motivation 1 – GP-based impulse response estimation

Consider a linear time-invariant dynamical system described by

$$y(t_k) = \int_0^{\infty} g(\tau) u(t_k - \tau) d\tau + e(t_k).$$

Task: Learn a model of the true underlying impulse response $g(\tau)$.

Placing a GP prior on the impulse response offers better performance than the "classical" system identification approach.

This is interesting since this is a problem everyone considered to be solved long time ago...

Gianluigi Pillonetto and Giuseppe De Nicolao. **A new kernel-based approach for linear system identification.** *Automatica*, 46(1):81–93, 2010.

Gianluigi Pillonetto, Francesco Dinuzzo, Tianshi Chen, Giuseppe De Nicolao, and Lennart Ljung. **Kernel methods in system identification, machine learning and function estimation: A survey.** *Automatica*, 50(3):657–682, 2014.

Motivation 1 – GP-based impulse response estimation

An instantiation of the key lesson of contemporary machine learning:

Flexible models often give the best performance.

The GP offers a **data-driven tuning of the model flexibility**.

Can be interpreted as a data-driven **regularization** striking a bias-variance trade-off that is "just right".

We recently showed that you can bridge "classic" parametric approaches and the GP-based approach via a **decision-theoretic** formulation.

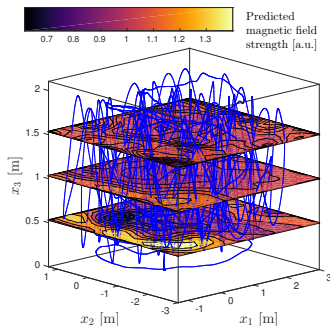
Johan Wagberg, Dave Zachariah and Thomas B. Schön. **Regularized parametric system identification: a decision-theoretic formulation**. In *Proceedings of the American Control Conference (ACC)*, Milwaukee, WI, USA, June, 2018.

Motivation 2 – Develop a linearly constrained GP

Innovation: Modification of the covariance function in a GP to correctly account for **known linear operator** constraints.

Result:

1. A probabilistic model that is **guaranteed** to fulfil known linear operator constraints.
2. A **constructive procedure** for designing the transformation.



Visit our poster for more details.

Motivation 3 – GP-based nonlinear state space model

“Inspired by the Gaussian process, enabled by the particle filter”

$$\begin{aligned}x_{t+1} &= f(x_t) + w_t, & \text{s.t. } f(x) &\sim \mathcal{GP}(0, \kappa_{\eta, f}(x, x')), \\y_t &= g(x_t) + e_t, & \text{s.t. } g(x) &\sim \mathcal{GP}(0, \kappa_{\eta, g}(x, x')).\end{aligned}$$

Results in a **flexible** non-parametric model where the GP prior takes on the **role of a regularizer**.

We can now find the posterior distribution

$$p(f, g, Q, R, \eta \mid y_{1:T}),$$

via some approximation (we use **particle MCMC**).

Frigola, Roger, Fredrik Lindsten, Thomas B. Schön, and Carl Rasmussen. **Bayesian inference and learning in Gaussian process state-space models with particle MCMC**. In *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems (NIPS)*, 2013.

Andreas Svensson and Thomas B. Schön. **A flexible state space model for learning nonlinear dynamical systems**, *Automatica*, 80:189-199, June, 2017.

Motivation 4 – Maximum likelihood learning of nonlinear SSM

$$x_t = f(x_{t-1}, \theta) + w_t,$$

$$y_t = g(x_t, \theta) + e_t,$$

$$x_0 \sim p(x_0 | \theta).$$

Maximum likelihood – model the unknown parameters as a deterministic variable θ and solve

$$\max_{\theta} p(y_{1:T} | \theta),$$

where $p(y_{1:T} | \theta) = \prod_{t=1}^T \int p(y_t | x_t, \theta) \underbrace{p(x_t | y_{1:t-1}, \theta)}_{\text{approx. by PF}} dx_t$.

Challenge: The optimization problem is stochastic!

Adrian G. Wills and Thomas B. Schön. On the construction of probabilistic Newton-type algorithms, *Proceedings of the 56th IEEE Conference on Decision and Control (CDC)*, Melbourne, Australia, December 2017.

Motivation – why use the GP in system identification?

A few concrete applications include:

1. GP-based impulse response estimation
2. Develop a linearly constrained GP
3. GP-based nonlinear state space model
4. Maximum likelihood learning of nonlinear SSM
 - **Stochastic quasi-Newton algorithm (much more general)**
5. ...

Aim: Derive a stochastic quasi-Newton algorithm.

Spin-off: Combine it with particle filters for maximum likelihood identification in nonlinear state space models.

1. Motivation and background
2. **Mindset (prob. numerics) and problem formulation**
3. A non-standard take on quasi-Newton
4. μ on the Gaussian process (GP)
5. Assembling a new stochastic optimization algorithm
 - a. Representing the Hessian with a GP
 - b. Learning the Hessian
6. Testing ground – maximum likelihood in SSMs
7. Some ongoing research (if there is time)

Mindset — Numerical methods are inference algorithms

A numerical method **estimates** a certain **latent** property **given** the result of computations.

Computation is inference meaning that numerical methods can be interpreted as estimation/learning algorithms.

Basic numerical methods and basic statistical models are **deeply connected in formal ways!**

Poincaré, H. *Calcul des probabilités*. Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1896.

Diaconis, P. **Bayesian numerical analysis**. *Statistical decision theory and related topics*, IV(1), 163–175, 1988.

O'Hagan, A. **Some Bayesian numerical analysis**. *Bayesian Statistics*, 4, 345–363, 1992.

Hennig, P., Osborne, M. A., and Girolami, M. **Probabilistic numerics and uncertainty in computations**. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London A: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, 471(2179), 2015.

Mindset — Numerical methods are inference algorithms

The task of a numerical algorithm is

to estimate unknown quantities from known ones.

Ex) basic algorithms that are equivalent to Gaussian MAP inference:

- Conjugate Gradients for linear algebra
- BFGS for nonlinear optimization
- Gaussian quadrature rules for integration
- Runge-Kutta solvers for ODEs

The structure of num. algs. is similar to statistical inference where

- The **tractable quantities** play the role of "data" / "observations".
- The **intractable quantities** relate to "latent" / "hidden" quantities.

Problem formulation

If computation is inference maybe it is possible to use this in deriving new (and possibly more capable) algorithms.

What? Solve the non-convex stochastic optimization problem

$$\max_x f(x)$$

when we only have access to **noisy** evaluations of $f(x)$ and its derivatives.

Why? These stochastic optimization problems are common:

- The cost function cannot be evaluated on the entire dataset.
- When numerical methods approximate $f(x)$ and $\nabla^i f(x)$.
- ...

How? Learn a probabilistic nonlinear model of the Hessian.

Provides a local approximation of the cost function $f(x)$.

Use this local model to compute a search direction.

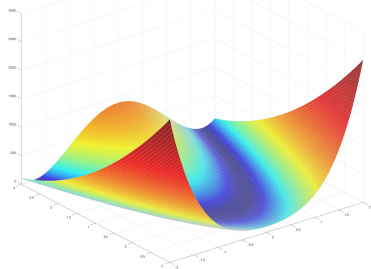
Captures second-order information (curvature) which opens up for better performance compared to a pure gradient method.

Intuitive preview example — Rosenbrock function

Let $f(x) = (a - x_1)^2 + b(x_2 - x_1^2)^2$, where $a = 1$ and $b = 100$.

Deterministic problem

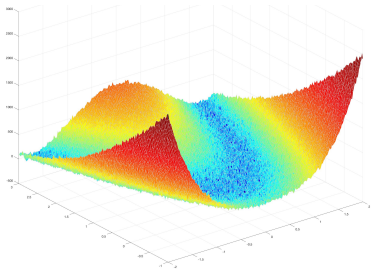
$$\max_x f(x)$$



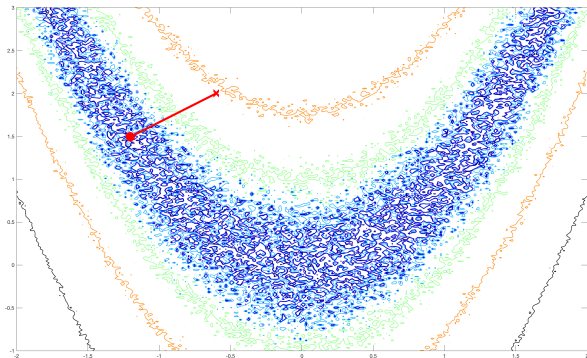
Stochastic problem

$$\max_x f(x)$$

when we only have access to noisy versions of the cost function
 $(\tilde{f}(x) = f(x) + e, e = \mathcal{N}(0, 30^2))$
and its gradients.



fminunc at work



Terminates at the wrong solution after 3 iterations.

The true solution is (1, 1).

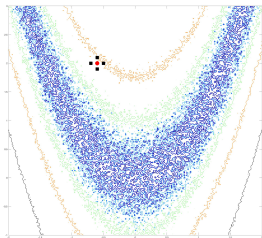
By not using the curvature information we expose ourself to the "banana-problem".

New algorithm at work — iteration 1

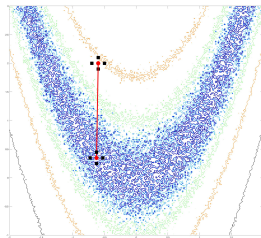
New algorithm at work — iteration 2

New algorithm at work — overall result

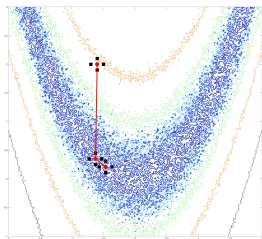
Initial value



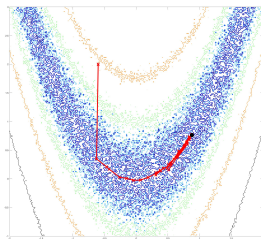
Iteration 1



Iteration 2



Iteration 50



Quasi-Newton — A non-standard take

Our problem is of the form

$$\max_{\mathbf{x}} f(\mathbf{x})$$

Idea underlying (quasi-)Newton methods: Learn a local quadratic model $q(\mathbf{x}_k, \delta)$ of the cost function $f(\mathbf{x})$ around the current iterate \mathbf{x}_k

$$q(\mathbf{x}_k, \delta) = f(\mathbf{x}_k) + \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{x}_k)^\top \delta + \frac{1}{2} \delta^\top \mathbf{H}(\mathbf{x}_k) \delta$$

A second-order Taylor expansion around \mathbf{x}_k , where

$$\mathbf{g}(\mathbf{x}_k) = \nabla f(\mathbf{x}) \Big|_{\mathbf{x}=\mathbf{x}_k},$$

$$\mathbf{H}(\mathbf{x}_k) = \nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \Big|_{\mathbf{x}=\mathbf{x}_k},$$

$$\delta = \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_k.$$

We have measurements of the

- cost function $f_k = f(\mathbf{x}_k)$
- and its gradient $\mathbf{g}_k = \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{x}_k)$.

Question: How do we update the Hessian model?

Line segment connecting two adjacent iterates \mathbf{x}_k and \mathbf{x}_{k+1} :

$$\mathbf{r}_k(\tau) = \mathbf{x}_k + \tau(\mathbf{x}_{k+1} - \mathbf{x}_k), \quad \tau \in \{0, 1\}.$$

Useful basic facts

The fundamental theorem of calculus states that

$$\int_0^1 \frac{\partial}{\partial \tau} \nabla f(r_k(\tau)) d\tau = \nabla f(r_k(1)) - \nabla f(r_k(0)) = \underbrace{\nabla f(x_{k+1})}_{g_{k+1}} - \underbrace{\nabla f(x_k)}_{g_k}$$

and the chain rule tells us that

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial \tau} \nabla f(r_k(\tau)) = \nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau)) \frac{\partial r_k(\tau)}{\partial \tau} = \nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau)) (x_{k+1} - x_k).$$

$$\underbrace{g_{k+1} - g_k}_{=y_k} = \int_0^1 \frac{\partial}{\partial \tau} \nabla f(r_k(\tau)) d\tau = \int_0^1 \nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau)) d\tau \underbrace{(x_{k+1} - x_k)}_{s_k}.$$

Result — the quasi-Newton integral

With the definitions $y_k \triangleq g_{k+1} - g_k$ and $s_k \triangleq x_{k+1} - x_k$ we have

$$y_k = \int_0^1 \nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau)) d\tau s_k.$$

Interpretation: The difference between two consecutive gradients (y_k) constitute a *line integral observation of the Hessian*.

Problem: Since the Hessian is unknown there is no functional form available for it.

Solution 1 — recovering existing quasi-Newton algorithms

Existing quasi-Newton algorithms (e.g. BFGS, DFP, Broyden's method) assume the Hessian to be constant

$$\nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau)) \approx H_{k+1}, \quad \tau \in \{0, 1\},$$

implying the following approximation of the integral (**secant condition**)

$$y_k = H_{k+1} s_k.$$

Find H_{k+1} by **regularizing** H :

$$\begin{aligned} H_{k+1} &= \min_H \|H - H_k\|_W^2, \\ \text{s.t. } & H = H^\top, \quad H s_k = y_k, \end{aligned}$$

Equivalently, the existing quasi-Newton methods can be interpreted as **particular instances of Bayesian linear regression**.

Solution 2 — use a flexible nonlinear model

Our approach is fundamentally different.

Recall that the problem is **stochastic** and **nonlinear**.

Hence, we need a model that can deal with such a problem.

Idea: Represent the Hessian using a **Gaussian process** learnt from data.

Two of the remaining challenges:

1. Can we use line integral observations when learning a GP?
2. How do we ensure that the resulting GP represents a Hessian?

μ on the Gaussian process (GP)

The Gaussian process is a model for nonlinear functions

Q: Why is the Gaussian process used everywhere?

It is a **non-parametric** and **probabilistic** model for nonlinear functions.

- **Non-parametric** means that it does not rely on any particular parametric functional form to be postulated.
- **Probabilistic** means that it takes uncertainty into account in every aspect of the model.

An abstract idea

In probabilistic (Bayesian) linear regression

$$y_t = \underbrace{\theta^T \mathbf{x}_t}_{f(\mathbf{x}_t)} + e_t, \quad e_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2),$$

we place a prior on θ , e.g. $\theta \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \alpha^2 I)$.

(Abstract) idea: What if we instead place a prior directly on the function $f(\cdot)$

$$f \sim p(f)$$

and look for $p(f | y_{1:T})$ rather than $p(\theta | y_{1:T})$?!

One concrete construction

Well, one (arguably simple) idea on how we can reason probabilistically about an unknown function f is by assuming that $f(\mathbf{x})$ and $f(\mathbf{x}')$ are jointly Gaussian distributed

$$\begin{pmatrix} f(\mathbf{x}) \\ f(\mathbf{x}') \end{pmatrix} \sim \mathcal{N}(m, K).$$

If we accept the above idea we can without conceptual problems generalize to any *arbitrary* finite set of input values $\{\mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_2, \dots, \mathbf{x}_T\}$.

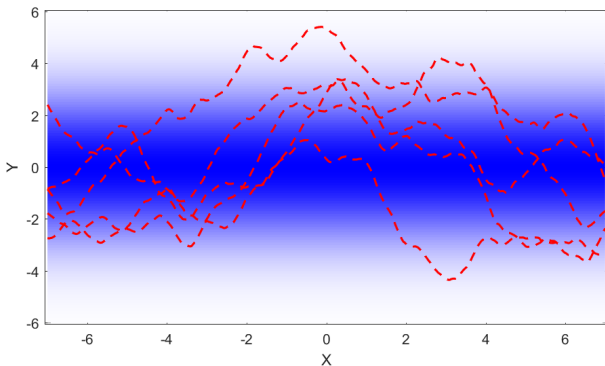
$$\begin{pmatrix} f(\mathbf{x}_1) \\ \vdots \\ f(\mathbf{x}_T) \end{pmatrix} \sim \mathcal{N} \left(\begin{pmatrix} m(\mathbf{x}_1) \\ \vdots \\ m(\mathbf{x}_T) \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} k(\mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_1) & \dots & k(\mathbf{x}_1, \mathbf{x}_T) \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ k(\mathbf{x}_T, \mathbf{x}_1) & \dots & k(\mathbf{x}_T, \mathbf{x}_T) \end{pmatrix} \right)$$

Definition: (Gaussian Process, GP) A GP is a (potentially infinite) collection of random variables such that any finite subset of it is jointly distributed according to a Gaussian.

We now have a prior!

$$f \sim \mathcal{GP}(m, k)$$

The GP is a **generative** model so let us first sample from the prior.



Stochastic optimization

Stochastic quasi-Newton integral

$$y_k = \int_0^1 \underbrace{B(r_k(\tau))}_{=\nabla^2 f(r_k(\tau))} s_k d\tau + e_k,$$

corresponds to noisy (e_k) gradient observations.

Since $B(\mathbf{x})s_k$ is a column vector the integrand is given by

$$\text{vec}(B(\mathbf{x})s_k) = (s_k^T \otimes I) \text{vec}(B(\mathbf{x})) = (s_k^T \otimes I) \text{vec}(B(\mathbf{x})),$$

where $\text{vec}(B(\mathbf{x})) = \underbrace{D \text{vech}(B(\mathbf{x}))}_{\tilde{B}(\mathbf{x})}$.

Let us use a GP model for the unique elements of the Hessian

$$\tilde{B}(\mathbf{x}) \sim \mathcal{GP}(\mu(\mathbf{x}), \kappa(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{x}')).$$

Summary: resulting stochastic quasi-Newton integral:

$$y_k = \underbrace{(s_k^T \otimes I)D}_{=\bar{D}_k} \int_0^1 \tilde{B}(r_k(\tau))d\tau + e_k,$$

with the following model for the Hessian

$$\tilde{B}(x) \sim \mathcal{GP}(\mu(x), \kappa(x, x')).$$

The Hessian can now be estimated using tailored GP regression.

The Gaussian process is closed under linear operators implying that

$$y_k \sim \mathcal{N}(m_k, K_{kk}),$$

where

$$m_k = \bar{D}_k \int_0^1 \mu(r_k(\tau)) d\tau,$$
$$K_{kk} = \bar{D}_k \int_0^1 \int_0^1 \kappa(r_k(\tau), r_k(t)) d\tau dt \bar{D}_k^T + R.$$

Not so basic fact: These integrals are challenging, but they can be solved.

Hessian posterior distribution

Setting: We have training data available in the form $\{s_i, y_i\}_{i=1}^N$.

Model assumptions:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \tilde{B}_* \\ \mathbf{y} \end{pmatrix} \sim \mathcal{N} \left(\begin{pmatrix} m_{s_*} \\ m_s \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} K_{s_* s_*} & K_{s_* s} \\ K_{s s_*} & K_{s s} \end{pmatrix} \right).$$

$$\mathbf{y} = \begin{pmatrix} y_1 & y_2 & \cdots & y_N \end{pmatrix}^T, \quad \mathbf{s} = \begin{pmatrix} s_1 & s_2 & \cdots & s_N \end{pmatrix}^T.$$

Result of using the new Hessian information

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{B}_* | \mathbf{y} &\sim \mathcal{N}(m_p, K_p), \\ m_p &= m_{s_*} - K_{s_* s} K_{s s}^{-1} (\mathbf{y} - m_s), \\ K_p &= K_{s_* s_*} - K_{s_* s} K_{s s}^{-1} K_{s s_*}. \end{aligned}$$

Resulting stochastic optimization algorithm

Standard non-convex numerical optimization loop with **non-standard components**.

Algorithm 1 Probabilistic optimization

1. **Initialization** ($k = 1$)
 2. **while** *not terminated* **do**
 - (a) Compute a search direction p_k using the current approximation of the gradient g_k and Hessian B_k .
 - (b) Probabilistic line search to find a step length α_k and set
$$x_{k+1} = x_k + \alpha_k p_k.$$
 - (c) Set $k := k + 1$
 - (d) Update the Hessian estimate (tailored GP regression)
 3. **end while**
-

Testing ground – nonlinear sys.id.

Probabilistic modelling of dynamical systems

$$x_t = f(x_{t-1}, \theta) + w_t,$$

$$y_t = g(x_t, \theta) + e_t,$$

$$x_0 \sim p(x_0 | \theta),$$

$$(\theta \sim p(\theta)).$$

$$x_t | (x_{t-1}, \theta) \sim p(x_t | x_{t-1}, \theta),$$

$$y_t | (x_t, \theta) \sim p(y_t | x_t, \theta),$$

$$x_0 \sim p(x_0 | \theta),$$

$$(\theta \sim p(\theta)).$$

Corresponding full probabilistic model:

$$p(x_{0:T}, \theta, y_{1:T}) = \prod_{t=1}^T \underbrace{p(y_t | x_t, \theta)}_{\text{observation}} \underbrace{\prod_{t=1}^T p(x_t | x_{t-1}, \theta)}_{\text{dynamics}} \underbrace{p(x_0 | \theta)}_{\text{state}} \underbrace{p(\theta)}_{\text{param.}}$$

prior

Model = probability distribution!

Maximum likelihood – model the unknown parameters as a deterministic variable θ and solve

$$\hat{\theta} = \arg \max_{\theta} p(y_{1:T} | \theta)$$

Cost function – the likelihood

Each element $p(y_t | y_{1:t-1}, \theta)$ in the likelihood

$$p(y_{1:T} | \theta) = \prod_{t=1}^T p(y_t | y_{1:t-1}, \theta),$$

can be computed by averaging over all possible values for the state x_t ,

$$p(y_t | y_{1:t-1}, \theta) = \int p(y_t | x_t, \theta) \underbrace{p(x_t | y_{1:t-1}, \theta)}_{\text{approx. by PF}} dx_t.$$

Non-trivial fact: The likelihood estimates obtained from the particle filter (PF) are **unbiased**.

Tutorial paper on the use of the PF (an instance of sequential Monte Carlo, SMC) for nonlinear sys.id.

ex) Simple linear toy problem

Identify the parameters $\theta = (a, c, q, r)^\top$ in

$$x_{t+1} = ax_t + w_t,$$

$$y_t = cx_t + e_t,$$

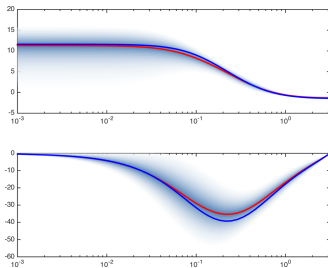
$$w_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, q),$$

$$e_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, r).$$

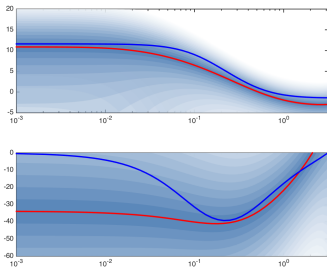
Observations:

- The likelihood $L(\theta) = p(y_{1:T} | \theta)$ and its gradient $\nabla_{\theta} L(\theta)$ are available in closed form via standard Kalman filter equations.
- Standard gradient-based search algorithms applies.
- Deterministic optimization problem $(L(\theta), \nabla_{\theta} L(\theta))$ noise-free).

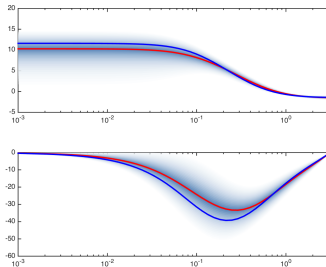
ex) Simple linear toy problem



Both alg. for in the noise-free case.

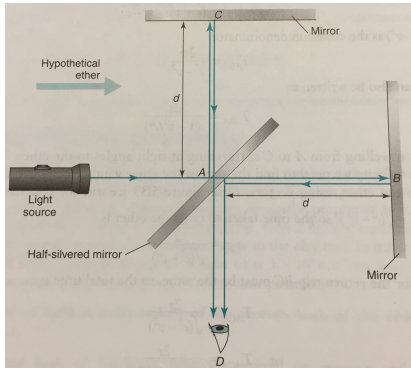


Classical BFGS alg. for noisy observations of $L(\theta)$ and $\nabla L(\theta)$.



GP-based BFGS alg. with noisy observations of $L(\theta)$ and $\nabla L(\theta)$. 40/47

ex) laser interferometry



The classic Michelson-Morley experiment from 1887.

Idea: Merge two light sources to create an interference pattern by superposition.

Two cases:

1. Mirror B and C at the **same** distance from mirror A.
2. Mirror B and C at **different** distances from mirror A.

ex) laser interferometry

Dynamics: constant velocity model (with unknown force w)

$$\begin{pmatrix} \dot{p} \\ \dot{v} \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} p \\ v \end{pmatrix} + \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ w \end{pmatrix}.$$

Measurements: generated using two detectors

$$y_1 = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \cos(\kappa p) + e_1, \quad e_1 \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2),$$

$$y_2 = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \sin(\kappa p + \gamma) + e_2, \quad e_2 \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma^2).$$

Unknown parameters: $\theta = (\alpha_0 \quad \alpha_1 \quad \beta_0 \quad \beta_1 \quad \gamma \quad \sigma)^T$.

Resulting maximum likelihood system identification problem

$$\max_{\theta} p(y_{1:T} | \theta)$$

Recent unpublished work – scaling up to large problems

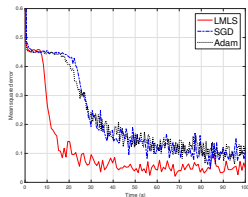
What is the key limitation of our GP-based optimization algorithm?

It does not scale to large-scale problems!

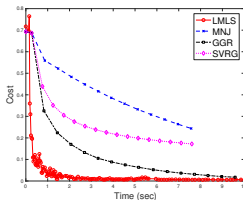
It is still highly useful and competitive for **small to medium** sized problems involving up to a coupled of hundred parameters or so.

We have developed a new technique that scales to **very large** problems.

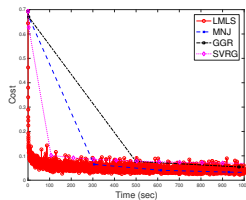
Recent unpublished work – scaling up to large problems



Training a deep CNN for MNIST data.



Logistic loss function with an L2 regularizer, gisette, 6 000 observations and 5 000 unknown variables.



Logistic loss function with an L2 regularizer, URL, 2 396 130 observations and 3 231 961 unknown variables.

Key innovations

- Replace the GP with a matrix updated using fast Cholesky routines.
- Exploit a receding history of iterates and gradients akin to L-BFGS.
- An auxiliary variable Markov chain construction.

For details, stay tuned in arXiv next week.

System identification



the Gaussian process

Remember to talk to people who work on **different problems** with
different tools!!

Open positions in the team



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We are looking for:

- **Tenure track** in Automatic Control/Machine Learning. Opening soon.
- 2 **PhD students** in statistical Machine Learning linked to dynamical systems. Open now. uu.se/en/about-uu/join-us/details/?positionId=192505

If you are interested (or know someone who might be), just talk to me or send me an e-mail (thomas.schon@it.uu.se).

Feel free to **spread this information** to anyone who might find this interesting!!