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Hugo A. Akitaya, Erik D. Demaine, Martin L. Demaine, Adam Hesterberg, Ferran Hurtado
et al.

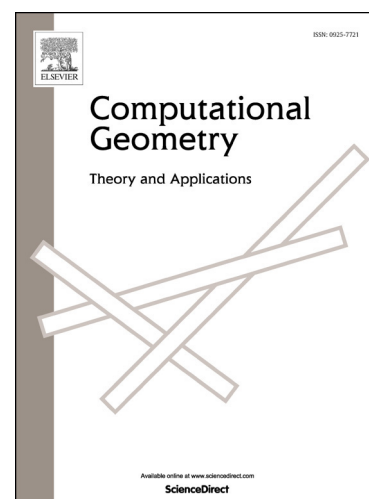
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Pachinko

Hugo A. Akitaya Erik D. Demaine Martin L. Demaine Adam Hesterberg
 Ferran Hurtado Jason S. Ku Jayson Lynch

Abstract

Inspired by the Japanese game Pachinko, we study simple (perfectly “inelastic” collisions) dynamics of a unit ball falling amidst point obstacles (*pins*) in the plane. A classic example is that a checkerboard grid of pins produces the binomial distribution, but what probability distributions result from different pin placements? In the 50-50 model, where the pins form a subset of this grid, not all probability distributions are possible, but surprisingly the uniform distribution is possible for $\{1, 2, 4, 8, 16\}$ possible drop locations. Furthermore, every probability distribution can be approximated arbitrarily closely, and every dyadic probability distribution can be divided by a suitable power of 2 and then constructed exactly (along with extra “junk” outputs). In a more general model, if a ball hits a pin off center, it falls left or right accordingly. Then we prove a universality result: any distribution of n dyadic probabilities, each specified by k bits, can be constructed using $O(nk^2)$ pins, which is close to the information-theoretic lower bound of $\Omega(nk)$.

In memory of our friend Ferran Hurtado.

1 Introduction

Pachinko [8, 7] is a popular mechanical gambling game found in tens of thousands of arcade parlors throughout Japan. The player fires Pachinko balls (ball bearings) into a vertical, nearly two-



Figure 1: Close-up of Pachinko machine. Photo by Neil Heeney, 2012, used with permission. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/heeney/8188927393>

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