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Week 6

Grosz: Collaborative Systems

In this paper, the author presents a formal description of collaborating and distinguishes collaborating from other kinds of group activity. Collaborating is more than just the sum of the individual plans, as can be seen when unforeseen circumstances cause the agents to re-plan the events. Agents must commit to joint activity, agree on a recipe for the action and determine what agents are doing which parts. Grosz gives a number of examples where the subtle differences between collaboration and contracting (as well as collaboration and interacting) are highlighted.

Collaboration seems to be the best kind of relationship for getting the group goals accomplished; however, it is a bit strange when talking about a computer because the goals of the group are all of your own goals. This seems not unlike contracting, if the agent is "hired" to "satisfy the human's goals". A collaborative style interaction for the interface seems ideal, however. If the computer can do as much of the task as possible independently, trying new actions where appropriate to complete the goals and only asking for assistance when necessary it could free up the human to potentially accomplish more tasks. It does raise the question, however, of how a goal could be communicated to the computer without requiring so much specification that the user might as well have done the task instead. This communication process will likely be two way, with the user under-specifying the problem and the computer seeking clarification when necessary.