

Chapter 2

The Configuration Space of a Rigid Body

The basic problem to be considered in this chapter consists of a freely moving rigid body \mathcal{B} surrounded by stationary rigid bodies $\mathcal{O}_1 \dots \mathcal{O}_k$. The stationary bodies represent fingertips, fixturing elements, or terrain segments supporting \mathcal{B} against gravity. The body \mathcal{B} represents the object being grasped, a workpiece, or the rigidified multi-legged vehicle. This chapter introduces the notion of the rigid-body configuration space, or *c-space*, which is essential for analyzing the mobility and stability of \mathcal{B} with respect to its surrounding bodies. The chapter begins with a parametrization of \mathcal{B} 's c-space in terms of hybrid coordinates. Configuration space obstacles (c-obstacles) are then introduced, and several of their properties are described. The chapter proceeds to describe the first and second-order geometry of the c-space obstacles, as this geometry plays a key role in subsequent chapters. Finally, the notion of generalized forces or wrenches is introduced in the context of configuration space.

2.1 The Notion of Configuration Space

The points of the rigid body \mathcal{B} retain their relative distance as the body moves in the environment, and \mathcal{B} 's *configuration* specifies the stationary state of the object in the environment. Equivalently, the position of each of \mathcal{B} 's constituent points can be determined from its configuration. The specification of \mathcal{B} 's configuration requires a selection of two frames, depicted in Figure 2.1. The first is a fixed *world frame*, denoted \mathcal{F}_W , which establishes a coordinate system for the environment, or *workspace*, in which \mathcal{B} moves. We assume that workspace is modeled as an n -dimensional Euclidean space, \mathbb{R}^n , where $n=2$ or 3 . The second is a *body frame*, denoted \mathcal{F}_B , which is rigidly attached to \mathcal{B} . The configuration of \mathcal{B} can be specified by a vector $d \in \mathbb{R}^n$ describing the position of \mathcal{F}_B 's origin with respect to the origin of \mathcal{F}_W , and an *rotation matrix*, $R \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$, whose columns describe the relative orientation of the axes of \mathcal{F}_B with respect to those of \mathcal{F}_W . The collection of $n \times n$ orientation matrices forms a group under matrix multiplication, termed the *special orthogonal group*, and denoted by the symbol $SO(n)$.

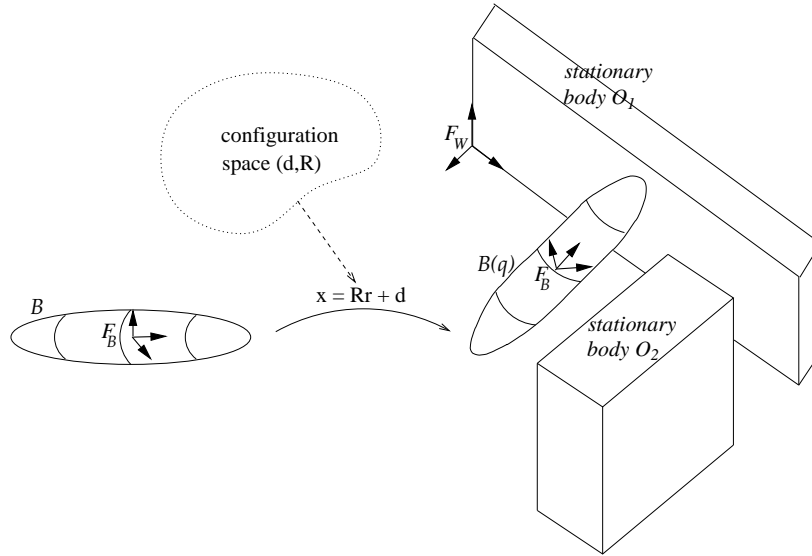


Figure 2.1: The physical geometry underlying the c-space representation of a 3D body \mathcal{B} . Think of \mathcal{B} 's configuration as a *placement* of \mathcal{B} in its workspace.

Characterization of $SO(n)$. The special orthogonal group of $n \times n$ orientation matrices is given by

$$SO(n) = \{R \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n} : R^T R = I \quad \text{and} \quad \det(R) = 1\},$$

where I is an $n \times n$ identity matrix.

The characterization of $SO(n)$ provides two important insights. First, every rotation matrix acts on vectors $v \in \mathbb{R}^n$ so as to preserve their length, since $\|Rv\| = (v^T R^T R v)^{1/2} = \|v\|$. Second, $SO(n)$ is a compact smooth manifold of dimension $\frac{1}{2}n(n-1)$ in the space $\mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$. In particular, $SO(2)$ is a one-dimensional loop in the space of 2×2 matrices, while $SO(3)$ is a compact three-dimensional manifold in the space of 3×3 matrices.

Definition 1 (Configuration Space). *The configuration space of \mathcal{B} , denoted \mathcal{C} , is the smooth manifold $\mathcal{C} = \mathbb{R}^n \times SO(n)$, consisting of pairs (d, R) such that $d \in \mathbb{R}^n$ and $R \in SO(n)$.*

The dimension of \mathcal{C} is the sum: $m = n + \frac{1}{2}n(n-1) = \frac{1}{2}n(n+1)$, giving $m = 3$ when \mathcal{B} is a 2-dimensional (2D) body and $m = 6$ when \mathcal{B} is a 3-dimensional (3D) body. We now introduce a parametrization of \mathcal{C} in terms of *hybrid coordinates* [7]. This parametrization allows us to locally represent \mathcal{C} as a Euclidean space \mathbb{R}^m , with some periodicity rules for the coordinates representing the orientation matrices.

We first introduce coordinates for $SO(n)$. The group $SO(n)$ is an important instance of a *Lie group*.¹ A standard means for parametrizing Lie groups is via *exponential coordinates*:

$$R(\boldsymbol{\theta}) = e^{[\boldsymbol{\theta} \times]}$$

where the matrix exponential can be formally defined via the series: $\exp(A) = I + A + \frac{1}{2!}A^2 + \dots$, and where $[\boldsymbol{\theta} \times]$ is a skew-symmetric matrix².

¹Lie groups are matrix groups possessing a smooth manifold structure.

²These skew-symmetric matrices form the *Lie Algebra* of the Lie group.

while the exponential coordinates for $SO(3)$ are a vector $\boldsymbol{\theta} \in \mathbb{R}^3$ (since $SO(3)$ is a three-dimensional manifold). The exponential coordinates are constructed in two stages.

Exponential Coordinates for $SO(n)$. The exponential coordinate for $SO(2)$ is a scalar θ (since $SO(2)$ is a one-dimensional manifold). The skew symmetric matrix in the matrix exponential representation of $SO(2)$ is the 2×2 matrix $[\boldsymbol{\theta} \times] = \theta J$ where $J = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$. Consequently, the 2×2 orientation rotation matrices are globally parametrized by the formula

$$R(\theta) = \begin{bmatrix} \cos \theta & -\sin \theta \\ \sin \theta & \cos \theta \end{bmatrix} \quad \theta \in \mathbb{R},$$

where θ is the relative orientation of \mathcal{F}_B relative to \mathcal{F}_W , measured using the right-hand rule (which measures angles in the counterclockwise direction around the upward-pointing normal to the plane).

For 3×3 rotation matrices in $SO(3)$, the skew symmetric matrix $[\boldsymbol{\theta} \times]$ has a physical interpretation as a *cross-product* matrix: $[\boldsymbol{\theta} \times] \vec{v} = \boldsymbol{\theta} \times \vec{v}$ for any vector $\vec{v} \in \mathbb{R}^3$. The direction of the vector $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ physically corresponds to the *axis of rotation*, and the norm of the vector, $\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\|$, corresponds to the angle of rotation³ about the axis of rotation. For $SO(3)$, it can be shown that the matrix exponential formula reduces to *Rodriguez' Formula*:

$$R(\boldsymbol{\theta}) = I + \sin(\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\|)[\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} \times] + (1 - \cos(\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\|))[\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} \times]^2 \quad \boldsymbol{\theta} \in \mathbb{R}^3,$$

where I is a 3×3 identity matrix and $[\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} \times]$ is the cross-product matrix of $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}} = \boldsymbol{\theta}/\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\|$. In Rodrigez' formula $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$ and $\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\|$ are the axis and angle of rotation of $R(\boldsymbol{\theta})$, measured according to the right-hand rule.

The parametrization of $SO(2)$ is periodic in 2π , with each 2π interval parametrizing the entire $SO(2)$. The parametrization of $SO(3)$ in terms of $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ satisfies the following periodicity rule. The origin of $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ -space is mapped by $R(\boldsymbol{\theta})$ to the identity matrix I . Similarly, all concentric spheres of radius $\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\| = 2\pi, 4\pi, \dots$ are mapped to I . Each pair of antipodal points on the sphere of radius $\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\| = \pi$ is mapped to the same matrix R , since $R(\pi\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}) = R(-\pi\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}})$ for all $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$. Similarly, antipodal points on the spheres of radius $\|\boldsymbol{\theta}\| = 3\pi, 5\pi, \dots$ are identified. Consider now a path in $\boldsymbol{\theta}$ -space from the origin to the sphere of radius π along a fixed direction $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$. This path represents a rotation of \mathcal{B} about $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$ by an angle which increases from zero to π . Moving next to the antipodal point $-\pi\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$, rotation of \mathcal{B} from π to 2π continues on a path which moves along $-\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$ back to the origin. Since $\hat{\boldsymbol{\theta}}$ can have any direction, the entire manifold $SO(3)$ is parametrized by the ball with center at the origin and radius π , with antipodal points on its bounding sphere identified.

Definition 2 (Hybrid Coordinates). *When \mathcal{B} is a 2D body the hybrid coordinates for its c-space are $q = (d, \theta) \in \mathbb{R}^2 \times \mathbb{R}$. When \mathcal{B} is a 3D body, the hybrid coordinates⁴ for its c-space are $q = (d, \boldsymbol{\theta}) \in \mathbb{R}^3 \times \mathbb{R}^3$.*

³*Euler's Theorem* states that every rigid body rotation corresponds is equivalent to a rotation about a fixed axis.

⁴Formally, the hybrid coordinates are $\mathbb{R}^n \times \mathfrak{se}(n)$, where $\mathfrak{se}(n)$ is the Lie algebra of $SO(n)$. However, $\mathfrak{se}(n)$ is isomorphic to \mathbb{R}^n , and so \mathbb{R}^n is used for simplicity

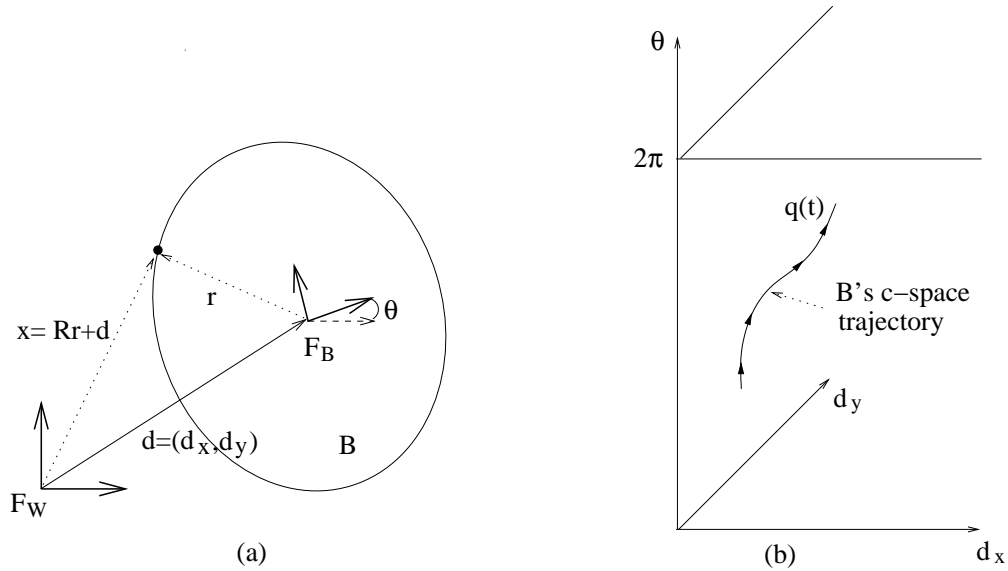


Figure 2.2: (a) Hybrid coordinates $q = (d_x, d_y, \theta)$ for \mathcal{B} 's c-space. (b) A c-space trajectory representing \mathcal{B} 's physical motion.

When \mathcal{B} is a 2D body its c-space is simply \mathbb{R}^3 in hybrid coordinates, partitioned into 2π layers along the θ axis (see Figure 2.2). Each 2π layer provides a full parametrization of c-space. Hence a path $q(t)$ can freely move between layers, or it can remain in a particular layer by wrapping through its bounding planes. When \mathcal{B} is a 3D body its c-space is simply \mathbb{R}^6 in hybrid coordinates, with the θ coordinates partitioned into a central ball and concentric shells each having a radius/thickness of π . Here, too, a path $q(t)$ can freely move between neighboring shells, or it can remain in the inner ball by wrapping through antipodal points on its bounding sphere.

To summarize, c-space allows us to model the physical motions of \mathcal{B} as trajectories, $q(t)$, of a point in \mathbb{R}^m , where $m = 3$ or 6 . Before we proceed to fill this space with forbidden regions representing the stationary bodies, let us review the notion of rigid-body transformation.

The rigid-body transformation. As \mathcal{B} moves along a c-space trajectory $q(t)$, the position of its points with respect to the world frame \mathcal{F}_W is specified as follows. Let b denote points of \mathcal{B} expressed in its body frame \mathcal{F}_B , and let x denote points expressed in \mathcal{F}_W (Figure 2.2(a)). The *rigid-body transformation*, denoted $X(q, b)$, gives the world position of \mathcal{B} 's points at a configuration q ,

$$x = X(q, b) \triangleq \begin{cases} R(\theta)b + d & q = (d, \theta) \in \mathbb{R}^3, b \in \mathcal{B} \quad (2\text{D case}) \\ R(\boldsymbol{\theta})b + d & q = (d, \boldsymbol{\theta}) \in \mathbb{R}^6, b \in \mathcal{B} \quad (3\text{D case}). \end{cases}$$

The notation $X_b(q)$ will specify the rigid-body transformation such that the point $b \in \mathcal{B}$ is held fixed. In this case $X_b(q)$ gives the world position of the fixed point b as a function of q .

Figure 2.3: The c-obstacle induced by a stationary disc, shown for two choices of \mathcal{F}_B 's origin: (a) at the ellipse's center, and (b) at the ellipse's tip.

2.2 Configuration Space Obstacles

From the perspective of \mathcal{B} , the rigid stationary bodies $\mathcal{O}_1 \dots \mathcal{O}_k$ form obstacles which constrain its possible motions. Since it is physically impossible for two different rigid bodies to occupy the same space, the stationary bodies induce forbidden regions in \mathcal{B} 's c-space, called *c-obstacles*. Let $\mathcal{B}(q)$ denote the set of physical points occupied by \mathcal{B} when it is at a configuration q , and let \mathcal{O} be one of the stationary bodies. The *c-obstacle* induced by \mathcal{O} , denoted \mathcal{CO} , is the set of configurations q at which $\mathcal{B}(q)$ intersects \mathcal{O} ,

$$\mathcal{CO} \triangleq \{q \in \mathbb{R}^m : \mathcal{B}(q) \cap \mathcal{O} \neq \emptyset\} \quad \text{where } m = 3 \text{ or } 6.$$

When \mathcal{B} is an n -dimensional body, the c-obstacle \mathcal{CO} is an m -dimensional set in the ambient c-space \mathbb{R}^m , even when \mathcal{O} is a point obstacle. The boundary of \mathcal{CO} is an $(m-1)$ -dimensional set, consisting of configurations at which \mathcal{B} touches \mathcal{O} from the outside. A curve on \mathcal{CO} 's boundary represents a motion of \mathcal{B} which maintains continuous contact with \mathcal{O} . In planar environments one can conceptually construct the boundary of \mathcal{CO} as follows. First one fixes the orientation of \mathcal{B} to a particular orientation θ . Then one moves \mathcal{B} along the perimeter of \mathcal{O} with this fixed orientation, making sure that \mathcal{B} maintains continuous contact with \mathcal{O} . The trace of \mathcal{B} 's origin during this circumnavigation forms a closed curve which is precisely the boundary of the fixed- θ slice of \mathcal{CO} . When this process is repeated for all θ , the resulting stack of loops forms the c-obstacle boundary.

Example 1. Figure 2.3(a) shows an ellipse \mathcal{B} moving in a planar environment populated by a stationary disc \mathcal{O} . The c-obstacle induced by \mathcal{O} is depicted in Figure 2.3(b) for two choices of \mathcal{F}_B 's origin, at the ellipse's center and at the tip of its major axis. While the two c-obstacles differ in their geometric shape (i.e. surface normal and curvature), they are topologically equivalent. This observation holds true under any choice of \mathcal{F}_W and \mathcal{F}_B .

The c-obstacle distance function. An analytic description of the c-obstacle can be constructed as follows. Let $\text{dst}(x, \mathcal{O})$ denote the minimal distance of a point x from a fixed set \mathcal{O} , given by $\text{dst}(x, \mathcal{O}) = \min_{y \in \mathcal{O}} \{\|x - y\|\}$. The minimal distance between $\mathcal{B}(q)$ and \mathcal{O} , denoted $d(q)$, is defined by

$$d(q) \triangleq \min_{x \in \mathcal{B}(q)} \{\text{dst}(x, \mathcal{O})\} = \min_{b \in \mathcal{B}} \{\text{dst}(X(q, b), \mathcal{O})\},$$

where $x = X(q, b)$ is the rigid-body transformation of the point $b \in \mathcal{B}$ when \mathcal{B} lies at configuration q . Note that $d(q)$ is strictly positive outside \mathcal{CO} and is identically zero inside \mathcal{CO} . Hence the c-obstacle \mathcal{CO} is described by the inequality,

$$\mathcal{CO} = \{q \in \mathbb{R}^m : d(q) \leq 0\}.$$

One can equivalently write $\mathcal{CO} = \{q \in \mathbb{R}^m : d(q) = 0\}$, but the above formulation anticipates later chapters where c-space is used to analyze the motions of a quasi-rigid body.

A detailed discussion of the c-obstacles can be found in textbooks dedicated to robot motion planning [1, 2, 4, 5]. The following list summarizes some of their key properties ⁵.

1. **Compactness and connectivity propagate.** When \mathcal{B} is compact and path connected, any compact and path connected obstacle \mathcal{O} induces a compact and path connected c-obstacle \mathcal{CO} .
2. **Union propagates.** When an obstacle \mathcal{O} is a union of two sets, $\mathcal{O} = \mathcal{O}_1 \cup \mathcal{O}_2$, its c-obstacle is a union of the c-obstacles corresponding to the individual sets, $\mathcal{CO} = \mathcal{CO}_1 \cup \mathcal{CO}_2$.
3. **Convexity propagates.** Recall that a set $\mathcal{S} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is *convex* if every pair of points in \mathcal{S} can be connected by a line segment lying wholly in \mathcal{S} . When \mathcal{O} and \mathcal{B} are convex bodies, each fixed-orientation slice of \mathcal{CO} is a convex set.
4. **Polygonality propagates.** When \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{O} are polygonal bodies, each fixed-orientation slice of \mathcal{CO} is a two-dimensional polygonal set. When \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{O} are polyhedral bodies, each fixed-orientation slice of \mathcal{CO} is a three-dimensional polyhedral set.

A popular method for computing the explicit shape of the c-obstacles for planar bodies can be summarized as follows. The method assumes that \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{O} are convex polygons. In this case each fixed- θ slice of \mathcal{CO} , denoted $\mathcal{CO}|_\theta$, is also a convex polygon. The vertices of $\mathcal{CO}|_\theta$ correspond to configurations at which a vertex of \mathcal{B} (having a fixed orientation θ) touches a vertex of \mathcal{O} , such that the bodies' interiors are disjoint. The vertices on the boundary of $\mathcal{CO}|_\theta$ can be computed by a simple algorithm which merges the vertices of \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{O} on a common unit circle [2, 4].

When \mathcal{B} is a smooth convex body and \mathcal{O} is a disc, one can explicitly parametrize the boundary of \mathcal{CO} as follows. First note that as \mathcal{B} traces the perimeter of \mathcal{O} with a fixed orientation, the contact point monotonically traces the entire perimeter of \mathcal{B} . Also note that having \mathcal{B} trace with a fixed orientation the perimeter of \mathcal{O} in \mathcal{F}_W is equivalent to having \mathcal{O} trace the perimeter of the stationary \mathcal{B} in \mathcal{F}_B . Based on these observations, let $\beta(s)$ for $s \in \mathbb{R}$ be a parametrization of \mathcal{B} 's perimeter in \mathcal{F}_B , such that the tangent $\beta'(s)$ is a unit vector. Let $J\beta'(s)$ be the unit outward normal to \mathcal{B} , where $J = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & -1 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$. Let r be the radius of disc \mathcal{O} , and let x_0 be the position of its center in \mathcal{F}_W . Then during a motion of \mathcal{O} along \mathcal{B} 's perimeter, the curve traced by \mathcal{O} 's center in \mathcal{F}_B is: $\beta(s) + rJ\beta'(s)$ for $s \in \mathbb{R}$. Based on a simple calculation (see Exercise 8), the curve traced by \mathcal{B} 's origin in \mathcal{F}_W is: $d(s, \theta) = x_0 - R(\theta)(\beta(s) + rJ\beta'(s))$, where $R(\theta)$ is \mathcal{B} 's fixed orientation matrix. When θ varies freely in \mathbb{R} , the function $\varphi(s, \theta) = (d(s, \theta), \theta) : \mathbb{R}^2 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ provides a parametrization of \mathcal{CO} 's boundary in term of s and θ . The c-obstacles depicted in Figure 2.3 were generated using this technique.

Example: Obtain the c-obstacle parametrization for an ellipse obstacle, described by $(x-x_0)^T P(x-x_0) \leq 1$ where $P > 0$. At the contact point $x(s)$: $P(x(s)-x_0) =$

⁵The term “propagate in this list implies that the property in the n -dimensional Euclidean workspace propagates, or is conserved, under the mapping to configuration space.ⁿ

$-\lambda R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s)$ for some $\lambda > 0$. Multiplying both sides by $P^{-1/2}$ gives: $P^{1/2}(x(s) - x_0) = -\lambda P^{-1/2}R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s)$. Taking the norm of both sides gives:

$$1 = (x(s) - x_0)^T P(x(s) - x_0) = \lambda \|P^{-1/2}R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s)\| \Rightarrow \lambda(s) = \frac{1}{\|P^{-1/2}R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s)\|}.$$

Substituting for $\lambda(s)$ in the contact-normals equation gives

$$P(x(s) - x_0) = -\lambda(s)R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s) \Rightarrow x(s) = x_0 - \lambda(s)P^{-1}R(\theta_0)J\beta'(s).$$

On the other hand, $x(s) = R(\theta_0)b(s) + d(s)$. Substituting for $x(s)$ and solving for $d(s)$ gives

$$\begin{aligned} d(s, \theta) &= x(s) - R(\theta)b(s) = x_0 - \lambda(s)P^{-1}R(\theta)J\beta'(s) - R(\theta)b(s) \\ &= x_0 - R(\theta)(b(s) + \lambda(s)P^{-1}J\beta'(s)), \end{aligned}$$

where θ is now freely varying in \mathbb{R} . Note that $b(s) + \lambda(s)P^{-1}J\beta'(s)$ is the curve traced by \mathcal{O} 's center in \mathcal{F}_B (what about \mathcal{O} 's orientation?)

The c-obstacle boundary is generally a piecewise smooth surface in the 2D case. For instance, when \mathcal{B} is a convex polygon and \mathcal{O} is a disc, \mathcal{CO} 's boundary consists of two types of smooth two-dimensional "patches" meeting along one-dimensional curves. An edge-patch generated by an edge of \mathcal{B} sliding on \mathcal{O} , and a vertex-patch generated by a vertex of \mathcal{B} sliding on \mathcal{O} . The boundary of \mathcal{CO} is locally smooth at any configuration at which \mathcal{B} touches \mathcal{O} at a single point, such that the two bodies are smooth in the vicinity of the contact. In particular, the entire boundary of \mathcal{CO} is smooth when \mathcal{B} and \mathcal{O} are smooth convex bodies (see exercise). Similar observations hold for the five-dimensional boundary of \mathcal{CO} in the 3D case.

2.3 The C-Obstacles 1'st and 2'nd-Order Geometry

When \mathcal{B} is contacted by stationary finger bodies $\mathcal{O}_1, \dots, \mathcal{O}_k$, its configuration q lies on the boundary of each c-obstacle \mathcal{CO}_i for $i = 1 \dots k$. We shall see in Chapter 4 that the free motions of \mathcal{B} are determined in this case by the first and second-order geometry of the c-obstacle boundaries i.e., by the c-obstacles' normal and curvature. Let us now focus on a particular stationary body \mathcal{O} , and derive formulas for the normal and curvature of its c-obstacle boundary, denoted $\text{bdy}(\mathcal{CO})$. We shall assume that \mathcal{B} touches \mathcal{O} at a single point, such that the two bodies have smooth boundaries in the vicinity of the contact. We first obtain a formula for the c-obstacle normal, then obtain a formula for its curvature.

2.3.1 The C-Obstacle Normal

By construction $\mathcal{CO} = \{q \in \mathbb{R}^m : d(q) \leq 0\}$. If $d(q)$ would have been differentiable at $q \in \text{bdy}(\mathcal{CO})$, its gradient $\nabla d(q)$ would be collinear with the c-obstacle outward normal at q . But $d(q)$ is identically zero inside \mathcal{CO} and is monotonically increasing away from \mathcal{CO} , implying that it is *non-differentiable* at $q \in \text{bdy}(\mathcal{CO})$. However, $d(q)$ is Lipschitz continuous,