BOOLEAN DISTANCE FOR GRAPHS

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The boolean distance between two points x and y of a connected graph G is defined as the set of all points on all paths joining x and y in G (ø if x = y). It is determined in terms of the block-cutpoint graph of G, and shown to satisfy the triangle inequality b(x, y) ⊆ b(x, z) ∪ b(z, y). We denote by B(G) the collection of distinct boolean distances of G and by M(G) the multiset of the distances together with the number of occurrences of each of them. Then |B(G)| = 1 + \binom{b}{2} where b is the number of blocks of G. A combinatorial characterization is given for B(T) where T is a tree. Finally, G is reconstructible from M(G) if and only if every block of G is a line or a triangle.

1. Boolean distance

All notation and terminology in this paper not defined below can be found in [1]. In particular a path does not have repeated points. If G is a connected graph, we define the boolean distance b(x, y) between points x and y of G as follows: if x = y, then b(x, y) = ø. and if x ≠ y, then b(x, y) is the set of all points on all paths joining x and y. The boolean distances of G can be determined by its block structure, as will be shown below. To this end recall that the block-cutpoint graph of G, bc(G), is the bipartite graph having as points the blocks and the cutpoints of G, in which block b is adjacent to cutpoint c if and only if c ∈ b in G. For any point x of G, let b(x) be x itself if x is a cutpoint of G and the unique block of G containing x if not. Since bc(G) is a tree [1, p. 37], for any points x, y of G there is a unique path joining b(x) and b(y) in bc(G), which will be denoted by P(x, y). The study of the cutpoints of G on P(x, y) suggested the concept of a "cutting..."
center" of a tree in [2]. The following result relating the boolean distances of \( G \) to its block structure can now be stated.

**Theorem 1.** For any distinct points \( x, y \) of \( G \), \( b(x, y) \) is the union of all blocks of \( G \) (considered as point-sets) lying on \( P(x, y) \) in \( \text{bc}(G) \).

**Proof.** The path \( P(x, y) \) has the form \( c_0, b_1, c_1, b_2, \ldots, c_{n-1}, b_n, c_{n+1} \) where the \( c_i \) are cutpoints and the \( b_i \) are blocks of \( G \) such that \( c_i \in b_{i-1} \cap b_i \). The first cutpoint \( c_0 \) appears only if \( x \) is a cutpoint and then \( c_0 = x \), otherwise \( x \in b_1 \), and similarly at the other end. First we prove the inclusion \( b(x, y) \subseteq b_1 \cup \cdots \cup b_n \). If a path of \( G \) leaves a block, it cannot return to this block, because that would necessitate repeating a cutpoint. Therefore if \( P \) is any path joining \( x \) and \( y \) in \( G \), then the sequence of blocks and cutpoints encountered by \( P \) is a path joining \( b(x) \) and \( b(y) \) in \( \text{bc}(G) \). But the latter path must be \( P(x, y) \), and so all the points of \( P \) are contained in \( b_1 \cup \cdots \cup b_n \). Now we prove the opposite inclusion \( b_1 \cup \cdots \cup b_n \subseteq b(x, y) \). Let \( z \) be any point of \( b_i \). Then by [1, p. 28] \( G \) has a path \( P \) joining \( c_i \) and \( c_{i+1} \) and containing \( z \) (if \( i = 1 \) and \( c_0 \) does not appear, then \( G \) has a path \( P \) joining \( x \) and \( c_1 \) and containing \( z \), and similarly at the other end). Let \( Q \) be any path joining \( x \) and \( c_i \) and \( R \) any path joining \( c_{i+1} \) and \( y \) in \( G \). Then by the previous argument, \( Q \) followed by \( P \) followed by \( R \) is a path in \( G \), and this path joins \( x \) and \( y \) and contains \( z \). □

As a corollary we can see that \( b(x, y) \) is a *boolean metric* in the sense of [4].

**Corollary 1a.** (1) \( b(x, y) = \emptyset \) if and only if \( x = y \).

(2) \( b(x, y) = b(y, x) \).

(3) \( b(x, y) \subseteq b(x, z) \cup b(z, y) \).

**Proof.** The first two statements are obvious, and third follows from Theorem 1. In fact for \( x \neq y \) there is equality in (3) if and only if \( b(z) \) appears in \( P(x, y) \). □

2. **Distance sets**

The set of all boolean distances between points of \( G \) is called the *distance set* of \( G \) and is denoted by \( \text{B}(G) \); it is understood that \( \emptyset \) is always included as a boolean distance. Obviously \( |\text{B}(G)| = 2 \) if and only if \( G \) is a block. If \( G \) contains a cycle, boolean distances between distinct point-pairs may be equal. We write \( p \) for the number of points of \( G \) and \( b \) for the number of blocks, trusting that there will be no confusion between the symbols \( b \) and \( b(x, y) \).

**Theorem 2.** If \( G \) is a connected graph with \( b \) blocks, then \( |\text{B}(G)| = 1 + \binom{b}{2} + 1 \). In particular \( |\text{B}(G)| = 1 + \binom{p}{2} \) if and only if \( G \) is a tree.

**Proof.** By Theorem 1, \( \text{B}(G) - \{\emptyset\} \) is the set of unions of blocks of \( G \) (considered as point-sets) lying on paths of \( \text{bc}(G) \) beginning and ending in blocks of \( G \).
Therefore $|B(G)| - 1$ is equal to $b$ (single blocks) plus (2) (paths joining distinct blocks). The result on trees follows from this and from the fact that a connected graph has $p - 1$ blocks if and only if it is a tree (certainly a tree has $p - 1$ blocks, and if new lines are added to a tree, the number of blocks first decreases and then never increases). □

We remark that for almost all graphs $G$ on $p$ points $|B(G)| = 2$ as $p \to \infty$, as it is observed in [3, p. 207] that almost all graphs are blocks. We also note that when $p \geq 3$, $G$ is a star if and only if $B(G) - \{\emptyset\}$ contains only sets with two or three points. The next theorem characterizes the distance sets of trees.

**Theorem 3.** Let $X$ be an $n$-element set and let $\mathcal{F} \subseteq \mathcal{P}(X)$ be a collection of \([[n]^{2}\rbrack$ subsets of $X$. Then there exists a tree $T$ with point-set $X$ and $B(T) - \{\emptyset\} = \mathcal{F}$ if and only if the following three conditions are fulfilled:

(i) For any $F \in \mathcal{F}$, $|F| \geq 2$.

(ii) Any set $F$ in $\mathcal{F}$ contains exactly $|F| - 1$ 2-element subsets of $\mathcal{F}$. These 2-element subsets have the form $\{x_1, x_2\}$, $\{x_2, x_3\}$, $\ldots$, $\{x_{k-1}, x_k\}$, where $\{x_1, x_2, \ldots, x_k\} = F$. We call $x_1$ and $x_k$ end-elements of $F$.

(iii) If $F_1$, $F_2 \in \mathcal{F}$ and $F_1 \cap F_2 = \{x\}$ where $x$ is an end-element of both $F_1$ and $F_2$, then $F_1 \cup F_2 \in \mathcal{F}$.

**Proof.** The necessity is obvious. In order to prove the sufficiency of the conditions, construct a graph $G$ having point-set equal to $X$ and line-set equal to the family of 2-element subsets of $\mathcal{F}$. Then $G$ has no cycles, for if $x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_{r-1}$ were the points of a cycle of $G$ in that order, then $\{x_i, x_{i+1}\} \in \mathcal{F}$ for each $i$ (indices mod $r$), hence by repeated use of (iii), $\{x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_{r-1}\} \in \mathcal{F}$. Then by (ii) $\{x_0, x_1, \ldots, x_{r-1}\}$ would have to contain exactly $r - 1$ lines of $G$, but it contains at least $r$ of them, a contradiction showing that $G$ has no cycles. Now if any two points of $G$ appeared more than once as end-elements, then by a standard argument $G$ would contain a cycle, which is impossible. Hence there appear at most $\binom{2}{2}$ pairs of end-elements, so $|\mathcal{F}| \leq \binom{2}{2}$. But by assumption $|\mathcal{F}| = \binom{2}{2}$, and it follows that every two points of $G$ appear as end-elements, and $G$ is connected. Thus $G$ is a tree and the point-sets of its paths are precisely the singletons and the members of $\mathcal{F}$. Hence $B(G) - \{\emptyset\} = \mathcal{F}$. □

3. **Reconstructibility from boolean distances**

The collection of boolean distances of $G$ can be regarded as a multiset by taking the multiplicity of the sets of points into account. For example, $\emptyset$ has multiplicity $p$ and the set of endpoints of a bridge has multiplicity 1. We thus define the boolean distance multiset $M(G)$ as the pair $(B(G), m)$, where $m$ is the
function

\[ m : B(G) \rightarrow \{1, 2, \ldots, \binom{p}{2}\} \]

that associates with each set \( S \in R(G) \) the number of unordered pairs \( \{x, y\} \) of points of \( G \) such that \( b(x, y) = S \). A graph \( G \) with given point-set is said to be reconstructible from its boolean distance multiset if \( G \) is uniquely determined by \( M(G) \), i.e., there is a procedure to identify the lines of \( G \) using only \( M(G) \).

We now determine the multiplicities of the blocks of \( G \) considered as point-sets.

**Theorem 4.** A set \( S \in R(G) \) has multiplicity \( m(S) = \binom{|S|}{2} \) if and only if \( S \) induces a block of \( G \).

**Proof.** Clearly we may assume \( S \neq \emptyset \). Then by Theorem 1, \( bc(G) \) has a unique path of the form \( b_1, c_1, \ldots, c_{n-1}, b_n \), where the \( b_i \) are blocks and the \( c_i \) cutpoints of \( G \), such that \( S = b_1 \cup \cdots \cup b_n \). Thus \( S \) induces a block of \( G \) if and only if \( n = 1 \). If \( n = 1 \), then

\[ m(S) = \binom{|b_1|}{2} = \binom{|S|}{2} \]

If \( n = 2 \), then

\[ m(S) = \frac{1}{2}(|b_1| - 1)(|b_2| - 1) < \binom{|S|}{2} \]

If \( n \geq 3 \), then

\[ m(S) = \frac{1}{2}|b_1| \cdot |b_n| < \binom{|S|}{2} \]

We define the block completion \( K(G) \) as the graph obtained by replacing each block of \( G \) by a complete subgraph on the same set of points. Thus \( K(G) \) is a 'block graph': see [1, p. 29]. Obviously \( G \) and \( K(G) \) have the same cutpoints. We then have the following corollary of Theorem 4.

**Corollary 4a.** For any connected graph \( G \), the block completion \( K(G) \) is reconstructible from the multiset \( M(G) \).

**Proof.** The blocks of \( G \) are uniquely determined from the condition \( m(S) = \binom{|S|}{2} \), and then two points are adjacent in \( K(G) \) if and only if they belong to the same block of \( G \). \( \Box \)

We conclude with the following corollary showing which graphs \( G \) are reconstructible from \( M(G) \).
Corollary 4b. A connected graph $G$ is reconstructible from $M(G)$ if and only if $G$ has no cycle of length greater than 3.

Proof. Assume that $G$ contains a cycle $C_n$ of length $n > 4$. Then $C_n$ is contained in some block $H$ having at least four points. If $H$ is complete we denote by $G_1$ the graph obtained from $G$ by deleting an arbitrary line of $H$. If $H$ is not complete we denote by $G_1$ the graph obtained from $G$ by adding a line between two nonadjacent points of $H$. In both cases $G$ and $G_1$ have the same cutpoints and blocks (considered as point-sets). Hence $bc(G) = bc(G_1)$ and $M(G) = M(G_1)$, so $G$ is not reconstructible from $M(G)$. Conversely, assume that $G$ has no cycle of length greater than 3. We show that all blocks of $G$ are lines or triangles. For otherwise there is a block $H$ with at least four points and the longest cycle of $H$ contains exactly three points, say $x$, $y$ and $z$. Then $z$, say, is adjacent to a fourth point $t$ of $H$, and there is a path $P = (t, \ldots, y)$ not containing $z$. If $x$ is not a point of $P$, then $(t, \ldots, y, x, z, t)$ is a cycle of length greater than 3, and if $x$ is a point of $P$, then $(t, \ldots, x, y, z, t)$ is such a cycle. This contradiction proves that the blocks of $G$ are lines or triangles. Therefore $K(G) = G$ and by Corollary 4a, $G$ is reconstructible from $M(G)$. □

References